

THE CALVINIST PSALTER

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Research of the rhythmic characteristics in text and melody, and their consequences for the new rendering of the Psalter

A few weeks ago the *De Interkerkelijke Stichting voor de Psalmberijming* [Interdenominational Organization for the Psalter] released a compilation titled *110 psalmen, proeve van een nieuwe berijming* [110 Psalms, Sample of a New Rendering]. This is a very happy occasion. It appears that it will not be long before the whole Psalter can again be sung in churches and homes, based on the beautiful, age-defying melodies and in a language understandable for our time.

It is clear from the preface that the Interdenominational Commission means this collection to be studied and proofread, but especially to be sung. The Commission will listen intently to the resonance and echoes of these sounds by the Dutch people.

The following observations should be perceived in the same way: not as dry theory, but as an attempt to remove any barrier to the proper understanding of text and melody; not as mere criticism, but, I hope, as a contribution to the further completion of this beautiful project.

First I will discuss some of the rhythmic occurrences in the original French Psalter. After that will follow a short description about a few problems of the Dutch Psalter, which will be illustrated with the some of the songs included in the test collection. In closing I will make some practical comments about the singing and accompaniment of these songs.

The French Psalter

The French Psalter went through a relatively short development. The earliest examples are included in a hymnbook of 1539, and already in 1562 the whole collection, text as well as melody, was completed. This collection, in spite of all its diversity, exhibits a strong unity, which has obviously been felt throughout the ages. It is, for example, noticeable in regards to melody, that the original form has remained practically unchanged through the course of time.

The course of the development in the Netherlands provides a clear illustration of this. In 1566 Datheen adopts the French melodies for his version of the Psalter. In 1650 these are carefully rechecked by Cornelis de Leeuw, who leaves them principally unaltered. This is even more remarkable because in his *Plichtrijmen* [Obligatory Rhymes] of 1649 he most definitely did make adjustments to an alternative Psalmody to fit the taste of the time. However, within the Psalter as a whole no one wanted to make any changes. In the new version of 1773 the melodies remain unchanged in the Church hymnals, not even the transpositions to a higher key that later crept in, were present. In organ books from that time, however, melodies have already been thoroughly ruined rhythmically and melodically.

Even the Psalm melodies that were used for the *Evangelische gezangen* [Evangelical Hymns] of 1806 have just whole notes with stereotypical pauses between lines. From the perspective of church music, this collection may be called a low point. In the *Vervolgbundel* [Sequel Collection] of 1868, the praiseworthy musical editor Bastiaans restored it to its former state. He scored the Psalm melodies again in their original rhythm. The same was done in the new hymnal of 1938, which also contributed in a practical sense to the recurrence of rhythmic singing of the Psalm melodies.

The melodies in the official Dutch versions of the Psalter have remained essentially unaltered through the centuries, despite the changes in books of organ accompaniments or in hymnals. No one dared to alter the tight unity of the Psalter.

In light of the stylistic and essential unity on the one hand and the relatively large size of the collection on the other hand, it is useful to subject the French Psalter to a kind of statistical inquiry. The goal is to get to know some of its characteristics and to assign a place to the exceptions.



The following conclusions regarding rhythm have been obtained through a systematic listing of all occurring rhythmic forms in the melody lines of the Psalms, organized in tables according to place and frequency. I have based them on 152 hymns, namely, the 150 psalms, the Ten Commandments, and the Praise of Simeon, as they are found in the first complete version of the psalms in 1562: *Pseaumes de David, mis en rime francoise par Clement Marot et Theodore de Beze*. For the above investigation I am also making use of

- the version from Strasburg, 1539, *Aulcuns pseaulmes et cantiques mys en chant*, which will provide some data about the articulations of the longer lines of the hymns;
- the version of Bourgeois, 1547, with four-part harmony, which will give us better insight into the closing notes of lines of melody;
- the version of Goudimel, 1565, in four-part harmony, which shows us the influence of the arrangement for several voices on the melodic forming of the cadences.¹

General Data

The majority of the 152 texts have an iambic text pattern. Only Psalms 25, 29, 38, 42, 47, 61, 75, 81, 86/77, 99, 102, 135, 136, 146 and 150 are trochaic and Psalms 33/67 and 48 are trochaic in the second half of the strophe.

It has to be observed that due to the peculiarities of French verse, the text's real rhythm can diverse greatly from the iambic or trochaic scheme. Put differently: a word such as *pla-ce* from the third line of Psalm 1 could still function as iambic in French. Of course these divergences do not occur with syllabled rhyme.

All tunes are scored in just whole and half notes and corresponding pauses. (Today the usual scoring in half and quarter notes is recommended. Below I will, however, follow the old scoring. This has, therefore, to be taken in account when comparing the Psalter of 1938.) Notes lengthened with a dot are not found. As symbol for note length only  occurs; we can look in vain for melodies with triple meter. *Tactus* is the whole note (semibreve), which receives a complete up-beat and down-beat with, as timing, *die Zeit zwischen zwei Schritten eines mässig gehenden Menschen* ('the time between two steps of a person walking at moderate pace' - Buchner c. 1550), or more precisely: '*Sie gilt so lange als der Pulsschlag eines ruhig atmenden Menschen* ('It is as long as the pulse of a person breathing calmly' - Gafurius 1496), in other words, about .

Concerning the metric construction of the melody, it should be added that this whole note is also the largest metric building block that remains unchanged. Namely, the different notes do not combine into larger rhythmic units in equal or regularly interchanging groups greater than the value of a whole note. This explains the difficulties which arise with attempts to provide melodies with barlines. (See the Psalter version of 1938.) It is, therefore, preferable to leave out all barlines. From the following it will be clear that the melodies are based on completely different principles of arrangement; barlines would actually be a hindrance to their discovery.

Is it certain that the Psalm melodies were designed or adapted specifically for the French texts. Only in 27 cases is the same melody used more than once. Therefore, in order to study the connection between text and melody we will have to leave out of the account the melodies that occur twice or more. With the Goudimel edition these are easy to recognize: only the melodies occurring twice or more have a polyphonic setting. All other melodies receive a note-by-note arrangement.

The following Psalms do not have their own melody: 53 (melody of Psalm 14), 62 (24), 63 (17), 64 (5), 65 (72), 66 (118), 67 (33), 68 (36), 69 (51), 70 (17), 71 (31), 76 (30), 77 (86), 78 (90), 82 (46), 95 (24), 98 (118), 100 (131), 108 (60), 109 (28), 111 (24), 116 (74), 117 (127), 139 (30), 140 (Ten Commandments), 142 (131) and 144 (18). Therefore 125 hymns remain to be included in the study.² The melodies are created in such a way that every syllable receives just one note. These are, therefore, syllabic hymns. Melisma, always at the end of the

¹ This version is almost identical with regard to melodies as the publication of 1562; Goudimel also remarks in the preface *Aux lecteurs* (To the Readers, transl.) that *le chant duquel on use en l'Eglise, demeure en son entier, comme s'il estoit seul* ('The harmony which people use in English, is delayed in its entirety, as if it were the only one,' transl.).

² The number of textual (metrical) schemes is extremely large, namely 110!

line, only occur in Psalm 2-4 (that is, Psalm 2 line 4), 6-1, 10-7, 13-4, 91-2 and 138-9. (I did not count separately the literal repetitions of more than one line). Generally speaking, the melody carefully follows the iambic or trochaic text pattern, which is the foundation of the respective Psalm. In other words, the sequence heavy-light is reflected in the melody through two sequential whole or half notes of which the first starts with up-beat – the first note of the tempo. This means that $- \sim$ is indicated with $\underset{\cdot}{\circ} \uparrow \underset{\cdot}{\circ} \uparrow$ or with $\underset{\cdot}{\circ} \uparrow \underset{\cdot}{\circ} \uparrow$. The exceptions to this rule will become clear from the items discussed below.

The function of long notes in general

1. a. The beginning and ending notes of every line are usually long, at least in the case of iambic Psalms. With trochaic Psalms it may be said that the beginning notes are usually short. This is, by the way, usually the case with 16th Century chorale. Compare the German chorales from the time of Luther or later, like *Vater unser im Himmelreich* [tune of ‘Lord Jesus, in the Days of Old’] or the melody of our Psalm 36, which originates in Strasburg. The long notes mark the beginning and end of the line of the verse. The beginning note of the whole hymn is long in every case so that it will always start with a down-beat. Otherwise, we find with Psalm 1-2, 1-5, 8-4, 9-4, 103-3, 103-6, 104-2, 115-2, and 137-3, at the beginning of the respective lines a half note, preceded by a half rest. Theses lines almost all belong to the same type. There are another 31 cases, such as in Psalm 20, in which two lines have been linked by means of two sequential half notes.

b. In the version of Strasburg from 1539 the lines of melody are separated by a vertical line. It is also evident that, in addition, all Psalms contained in it, which have lines of more than 9 syllables, namely 10 or 11, there is a vertical line after the first four notes of such a long line. For example, Psalm 1.

Qui au con-seil des ma-lings n'a es-te, qui n'est au trac des pe-cheurs ar res-te,
 qui des mo-queurs au blanc pla-ca n'a pri-se. Mais jour et nuict la loi con-tem-pl'et
 pri-se. De l'E-ter-nel, et en est de-si-reux. Cer-tai-ne-ment ce-luy la est heu-reux.

In this way those lines have been subdivided, and a long note appears at the beginning and end of each such a section of line. The texts correspond to this subdivision, in order that here also the melody serves the textual division that is present. From the rhythm tables³ it may be concluded that this kind of division is present in most of the longer lines; for those with 12 or 13 syllables not the first four, but the first six notes are set apart. See Psalm 89. In the case of both 1a, as well as, 1b, the long notes are thus employed to serve the musical interpretation of phraseology, in correspondence with the text.

2. It appears, after some sampling, that long notes are used to emphasize the important words of the text. Words such as *Dieu* (God) and *Seigneur* (Lord) generally have long notes. For example, Psalm 4:

Quand je t'in-vo-que, he-las, es-cou-te, O Dieu de ma cau-se et rai-son:

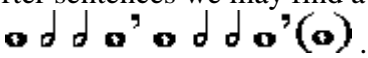
³ Further investigations show that the tune also has this connection.

Here the notes serve musical accentuation or articulation, in agreement with the text. That is, with the text of the first strophe. This limitation, if we try to imagine the methodology of the composer, is not surprising. We could cite many examples from the past and the present to illustrate that it is indeed a common practice to let the first strophe especially be the inspiration for the musical formation. I choose for example *Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme*:

"Wa - chet auf", ruft uns die Stim - me der Wäch - ter
Mit - ter - nacht heisst die - se Stun - de; sie ru - fen
sehr hoch auf der Zin - ne, "Wach auf", du Stadt Je - ru - sa - lem!
uns mit hel - lem Mun - de: Wo seid ihr klu - gen Jung - frau -
en? Wohl - auf, der Bräut - gam kömmt, steht auf, die Lam - pen nehmt! Ha - le -
lu - ja! Macht euch be - reit zu der Hoch - zeit, ihr müs - set ihm ent - ge - gen gehn!

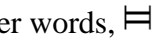
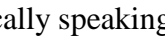
Note the accentuation of *Wachet auf*, *Wohlauf* and *steht auf* and the phraseology after these words. The rendering of *hoch* and the following trochees, which only occur in this strophe with *zu der Hochzeit*. These are all peculiarities, which for the strophes following, and even for the repetition of the first section of the first strophe, have lost their special meaning.

3. In many cases the long notes are not related to the text, but only serve a function for the rhythmic structure of the melody.

a. This is how in shorter sentences we may find an articulation as discussed in 1b, except that it only relates to the melodic architecture .

b. Further, we often see at the end or the beginning of the melody, or a part of a melody, a few long notes that have apparently arisen from a need to give the composition a formal rounding of. See also Psalm 4, in which the long notes at the beginning of the second line, as we have seen, relate to text, but at the beginning of the fifth they are used only for the sake of a formal analogy.

The function of closing notes

4. Usually, the (long) closing note of the various lines is followed by a full rest/pause. Fortunately, most researchers have slowly become convinced that these pauses are an integral part. In the various original publications they are noted precisely and the arrangements in multiple voices also took them carefully into account. They may not be considered as a peculiarity of the polyphonists who applied them to a one-voice setting. This may be seen from the fact that multiple-voice settings of several German chorales originating from the same period, which are in agreement with their one-voice notation, do not include pauses. However, more can be said about this matter besides simply noting that pauses are intrinsic. In 1547 Bourgeois scores, instead of a full closing note followed by a full pause, a double closing note (breve) without pause. In other words,  instead of . This notation shows us clearly how the pauses should be interpreted: rhythmically speaking such a pause belongs to the closing note of the previous line. It is not any different than a spelled-out phraseology. With respect to breathing we would, based on the notation of 1547, sing it this way. Rhythmically speaking, the closing note most certainly retains its double value and therefore takes up the most space between its neighbors. This in total agreement with the function of the closing notes in the totality of the Psalm melody.

The closing notes form the rhythmic and melodic anchor points of the melody, the pillars, the framework, between and over which the melody has been stretched. This is, for that matter, an important issue with all old music. It is connected to the idea of finale. The final note of the whole stanza is scored at maximum length, not because it ought to be sung that way, but to indicate as it were that at that moment the reverberation transforms into the inaudible “music of the spheres.” It is therefore not a matter of personal opinion that the closing notes of the lines are the goal of the melodic movement. With this music it is not an issue of how we, from our perspective, would like to interpret this or that, but only how this music presents itself to us, without prejudice. It is related to the old idea of music as “*imitatio naturae*.” It is not we who form the music, but the music that forms us. Let me mention some phenomena that will clarify my argument about the function of the closing notes:

- a. The closing notes are formed from the primary notes of the melodies.
- b. The closing notes, rhythmically speaking, have the largest value, they take up most space.
- c. Harmonically speaking: the dissonance of syncopation, as will be discussed in item 7, finds its resolution in the ending note.

This is equally true for lines that end with a toneless, as well as, the lines that end in a full-toned syllable. In the case of the toneless syllable there is, therefore, always a certain dissonance between text and melody.

d. There is one possible scenario in which the toneless syllable would virtually force us to perceive the ending note as “light,” namely with the sequence $\bar{o} \bar{o} \bar{o} \bar{o} \bar{r}$. It is notable that this sequence only occurs with Psalm 6^{1*}, 121⁶, 123⁴, 104³ and 123³ (in which Psalm 6¹ is excluded because of melisma) while, in contrast, the respective sequence $\bar{o} \bar{o} \bar{o} \bar{r}$ is common with the full-toned syllable.

Besides the regular case in which the closing note is followed by a full pause, there are the exceptions mentioned under item 1a. Additionally, there are a few cases in which standard lines are linked through the omission of the pause. Of this last kind the French editions of 1562 and 1565 have even more examples than the Dutch editions of 1566, 1650, 1773 and 1938. In a new score these ought to be restored. They may be found with Psalm 21-5&6 (not in 1938!), 47-1&2, 3&4, 5&6, 7&8, 9&10, 11&12*, 48-5&6, 9&10, (!), 52-1&2, 3&4, 55-2&3, 4&5 (!), 56-3&4, 7&8 (!), 61-1&2, 4&5*, 75-1&2, 3&4*, 81-1&2, 3&4, 5&6, 97-2&3 (!), 99-1&2, 3&4, 5&6, 7&8*, 138-2&3, 150-1&2, 3&4 (!). For Psalms 47, 61 and 99 and for Psalm 75-1&2, see items 6 and 9.

“Syncopation”

For convenience I define as “*syncopation*” every full note which begins with an up-beat: $\bar{u} \uparrow$

5. First, several Psalm melodies have a three-fold meter for the form $\bar{u} \uparrow \bar{u} \bar{u} \bar{u} \bar{u}$. However, the third note of such a grouping does not at all have the character of an unexpected rhythmic pace. In this case use is made of the regular option to insert a few triple meters into a continuous duple rhythm. Compare the second part of the *Wilhelmus* (Dutch National Anthem, transl.) in the version of Valerius, in which the same occurs.

We find this form with the following groups of Psalms melodies:


It is clear from these examples that we are dealing with counterpoint ornamentation. As apposed to the other voices, which reflect the normal rhythm, a few notes enter in delay, which causes a play of harmonious friction and resolution, characteristic of the forming of cadence in the 16th Century. In the cadence, the falling toward the final note, the final note is confirmed. The note that gives resolution, independent of the toneless or tone-full syllable, is the final note; this was already observed under item 4. In these placed the melody has obviously been influenced by the multi-voice nature of the score. The forming of the melody by itself, without keeping in mind the presence of real or latent accompaniment, is unintelligible. These cadences can only be approached from the perspective of harmony. In case of accompaniment of the melodies this needs to be taken into account if one wants to bring out the natural character of the melodies. It has to be noted that in this case also there is no substantial deviation from the normal rhythm of the text. Only with Psalm 131-1 does Goudimel allow the accompaniment to share in the rhythm of the melody; Psalm 124-3 has a divergent rhythm for the

accompaniment: . I will return to these examples in the discussion under item 9.

It is also appropriate to address the idea of “elevations” here. It is common, with these and related forms of cadence such as Psalm 150-4, to use accidentals, so-called fortuitous elevations. These are commonly not scored – see the above examples where I have added the note in question – but the singers knew their use. With respect to dissonance, already in the 15th Century Guilelmus Monachus spoke about the quarter note, which gives the *major* its “sweetness,” and the *secunde*?, which gives her the *minor*. We could add to this the *septiem*, which gives the *major* its “sweetness.” In our time we should notate them clearly, but only in the intended cases. I think that even with a single-voice performance of the Psalms, they should be sung. Are the forms of the cadence not inconceivable without the latently present harmony? Or should we at this point change the ornamental rhythm of the melody into the ground-rhythm?

Exceptions

A few cases remain in which the iambic or trochaic scheme of the text is not followed and cannot be understood from the above. These may be divided into two group, to which items 8 and 9 apply.

8. A few times, namely with Psalm 13-5, 24-1, 24-4, 33-7*, 33-10, 38-3, 73-6, 114-1, 114-2, and 148-1*, we find before the final note the rhythm . This is a known variant, which is utilized as final formula with melodies that have a three-fold rhythm. Compare the last line of *Wilt heden nu treden* [‘We Gather Together’]:



en ma - ken groot zyns lie-ven na-mens e - re, die daar nu on - zen vȳ - and slaat ter - neer!

Psalms 33-7 and 148-1 are mentioned in this group based on the observation of the accompaniment of Goudimel: here we are dealing with a combination of the rhythm discussed in this item together with “syncopation-cadences” that were discussed in the last item. With Psalm 33-7 this is also obvious when comparing it with the analogous tenth line. However, a few cases from the group seem to point to the influence of the textual rhythm that is divergent from the usual scheme. I will refer to these cases in the discussion about the next group.

9. The following unusual cases remain: Psalms 13-2, 25-1, 52-1, 61-1, 75-2, 84-1, 131-1, 141-1 and 149-5,6. The melodies are substantially different from their underlying iambic or trochaic textual schemes. In all these cases the melodic formation appears to have been determined by the actual textual rhythm of the French in their respective placing of the first strophe. We mentioned earlier in the article that the composer, generally speaking, has not taken into the account the individual rhythm of the text; this is due to the peculiarity of the French hymn. However, in the cases mentioned above, he has. It is noteworthy to mention that in the majority of the cases this concerns the first lines of the hymn. Because of their importance for the Dutch Psalter, I will provide a thorough discussion of these cases below.

Psalm 141-1:



The line starts in the trochaic pattern.

Psalm 75-1,2:



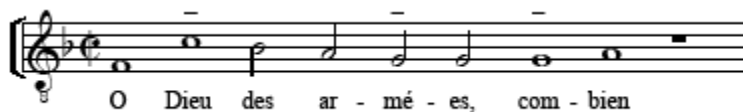
The beginning of the second line is iambic. Note the repetition in both text and melody.

Psalm 149-5,6:



The repetition of the melodic line is purely a matter of form.

Psalm 84-1:



Psalm 131-1 (also 100, 142):



This case resembles the previous one. The text in brackets is that of Psalm 100.

Psalm 25-1,3:



Again, the melodic repetition is just a matter of form. The melodic line could be perceived as

~~~~~|~~~~~: , with an anticipating “syncopation” at the beginning of the second part.

Psalm 61-1.

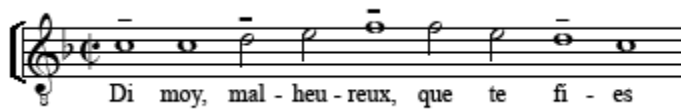


This case is analogous to the previous one.

Psalm 13-2:

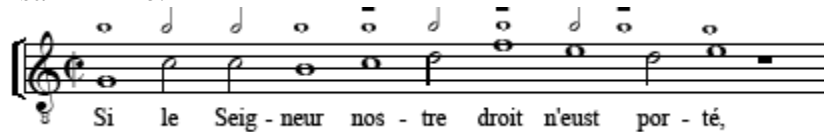


Psalm 52-1:



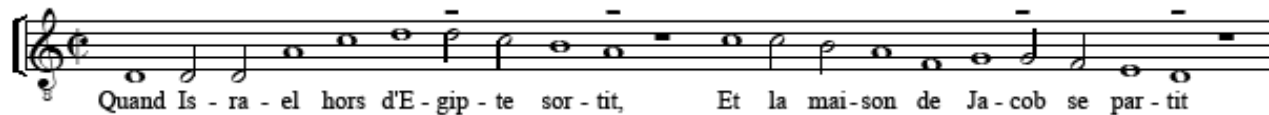
Lastly, I will mention again the case of Psalm 124-3 as mentioned under item 7 and also some that belong to item 8. In these cases the text seems to have had an influence on the forming of the melody.

Psalm 124-3:



The small notes indicate the rhythm of the accompaniment as seen in Goudimel.

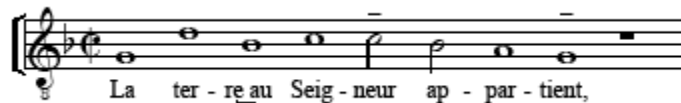
Psalm 114-1, 2:



Psalm 13-5:



Psalm 24-1 (also 62, 95, 111):



The fourth line of melody is just an analogy to the form of the first line. Note that in all three cases the fourth note from the end receives the emphasis.

### The Dutch Psalter

The large amount of freedom characteristic of the French text in relation to the melody is not possible in Dutch. At least, not in the use of language since 1600. Datheen could still use a word such as *spot-ters* in the third line of Psalm 1 as iambus. These days, in combination with a strong rhythmic melody, we find this unbearable. As we have seen, the melodies of the Psalms only diverge substantially from their underlying text scheme in the cases discussed under item 9. These are the only cases in the Dutch Psalter, while keeping their normal iambic or trochaic rhythm, which will cause a problem in their being sung. Let us study to what extent that has been taken into account in *110 psalmen, proeve van een nieuwe berijming* ['110 Psalms, sampling of a new Psalter'].

This seems to be the case completely with Psalm 141. The first line, which cannot be sung when fully iambic, has been changed.

The same can unfortunately not be said for Psalm 75. The second line of each stanza should start with two

iambuses. In their current rhythm these lines sound terrible. It should still be possible to change this.

While a normal iambic line could be sung in the melody of Psalms 100 or 131, it is regrettable that the melodic exception has not been honored. The beginning of the first stanza of Psalm 100 is in any case ugly: the comma is placed in such a way that is melodically impossible. It runs thus: “*Juicht Gode, toebazuint en zingt*”. [‘Sing for joy to God, blow the trumpet toward (play on a trumpet; cross between wind instruments?) and sing’]. (NOTE: The published version of 1968 has remedied this by reading: *Juicht God toe, bazuint en zingt* [‘Shout for joy to God, blow the trumpet and sing’]. -Ed.)

The melodic declamatory power of Psalm 25 would also have benefited if the special rhythm of the first line had been taken into account by beginning with two iambuses. Practically speaking, it is difficult to give momentum to this line in the old Psalter, because one would unconsciously perceive the first note as emphatic. The same is true for the second note of Psalm 84 in the old Psalter.

The peculiar character of the second line of Psalm 13 has not been taking into account, but this is less bothersome.

The other Psalms to which the cases of item 9 refer are not represented.

I would like to comment also on the first two lines of Psalm 114, even though they do not belong, strictly speaking, to the abnormal cases. If one wants to take into account the peculiar rhythm of these lines, one should certainly not assign them a toneless rhyme, a position that I have heard some defend. In doing so the beautiful structure of the line of melody would be totally destroyed. In that case, we would find ourselves in the rare situation mentioned in item 4d, but now made worse by applying it to the whole line:

ō ŷ d ō ō ō ŷ d ō ō r . It is usual to sing the old melody toward the final note, so that the whole line, as it were, culminates in it. That would become impossible in this case. If one wants something other than the normal iambuses, one could write, for example following the French text, something like „*Toen Israël het Egyptisch gebied*” [‘When Israel the area of Egypt’], in other words, making the fourth note from the end “heavy” and the final note “heavy.”

In the new Psalter it has been carefully monitored that as few as possible toneless syllables were assigned to long notes. Isolated long notes occur predominantly as beginning note of iambic line and as “syncopation” of the adorned form of cadence by the toneless rhyme. It seems to be annoying and unnecessary that the last case has even given rise to the changing of the rhythm of the text, as seen in the last line of the first stanza of Psalm 42. See the comments in item 7. A few times the heavy beginning syllable in iambic lines, especially when followed by a toneless syllable, give the impression of being awkward. Should these long beginning notes not be understood as a kind of “up-stroke” before the “down-stroke” that follows?

Good attention has been paid to the clear demarcation of the different lines of melody as discussed in items 1a and 4. Unpleasant enjambments hardly occur. It is a shame, however, that the articulation of the melody as discussed in item 1b has barely been taken into account. See, for example, Psalm 8: *o/ver* (over), *he/mel* (heaven), *ha/ters* (haters), *dui/zend* (thousand), *bij/na* (almost), *heer/sen* (reign), *wer/ken* (works) and *we/melt* (swarm). The Psalter of 1773 is in this respect especially accurate. Would corrections in these and related cases be an option?

It is self-evident that the highlighted cases in item 2 did not assert their influence. The forms that may have arisen as a result of the accentuation of the French text have in the end been fully absorbed into the structure of the melody.

### **Singing and Playing**

The essential points have already been discussed in the above section on the French Psalter. To allow the new Psalter its full potential, one should sing the Psalms lightly, in a natural movement of pulse and breath. A hand that moves up and down in a regular fashion – up and down also in the sense that the up-beat lasts the same amount of time as the down-beat, will contribute to the awareness of the rhythm. The first note of the stanza always starts as down-beat. The musical movement should always focus on the final tone of every line. The words should be pronounced with a natural accent of word, even with the occurrence of “syncopation.” In the case of “syncopation” allow the tones to sound naturally “like a bell,” in other words, do not give them

“bellies.” When accompanying the singing keep it as light as possible, with simple and natural harmonies. The harmonic sequence of the seventh interval – which has been so loved in our country (and elsewhere?) over the last decades - first interval with Doric cadences, is a distracting element. This form of “church tone” harmony is developed from a misunderstanding of the character of Psalm melodies. I also think that the accompaniment “in whole notes,” which is used occasionally, has to be discouraged. Instead of clarifying the melody it is more of a hindrance to the free movement. Here I want to mention emphatically that the form of “syncopation”-cadence as discussed in item 7, has to be respected. To get a better insight in to the natural harmonic functions of the Psalm melodies I have no better recommendation than to study thoroughly the scorings of Goudimel of Bourgeois. The *Stichting Centrum voor de Protestantse Kerkzang* [‘Organization Center for Protestant Congregational Singing’] has already published twelve of Goudimel’s Psalms. As an example I cite a harmonization of Psalm 43 based on Bourgeois.



### Connecting Text

Rev. Jan Wit, one of the poets of the Psalter, which at that time was being compiled, responded to the above article in the *Jaarboek voor de Eredienst van de Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk* (‘Yearbook for the Worship Service of the Dutch Reformed Church’, transl.) 1959. His observations about the French verse provided a valuable addition to several points of my argument, especially where he talked about caesuras and pauses. He said the following about this:

“In French, where the accent on the word fulfills a totally different function than in the Germanic languages, there is no regular alternation between light and heavy. When the difference in quantity of the original Latin was lost, they looked for a different method to determine the structure of a line of verse. That means was the counting syllables. In France they distinguish, therefore, verses of three, four, five, etc., syllables. The counting is ceased with the last emphatic syllable, which is part of the rhyme. The dropped “e” with the toneless syllable is, therefore, not counted. To give structure to the long lines of verse, a fixed accent is used in the middle of the line. The place of the fixed accent is determined through caesura. A caesura in a long line of verse is at the least a fixed boundary after a certain syllable. The “common” verse, the one that has ten syllables, always has the caesura after the fourth syllable; the “Alexandrian,” the verse with twelve syllables, always has the caesura after the sixth syllable. It is desirable that the caesura is something more than just a word boundary. Preferably, it should also be a boundary between two groups of words. It is not absolutely necessary that a punctuation mark is used, but a short breathing pause should be possible with a caesura. The syllable that precedes the caesura of course has to have the accent; it may therefore not be a feminine ending to a toneless “e” or a toneless ending to a verb. [ . . . ]

In lines of less than nine syllables, the French poets hardly ever used a fixed caesura. Such caesuras do, therefore, not occur in the Psalter. In the “common” verse, the ten-syllable verse, which is used very often in the Psalter, there is always a fixed word boundary after the fourth syllable. Marot, as well as, De Bèze, treats the caesuras somewhat carelessly. Only Psalm 89 is written in what later became the favorite in France, the “Alexandrian.” There we find a fixed word boundary after the sixth syllable. The character of the caesura is significantly clearer here than in some of the “common” verse.”

From Wit’s reaction it became obvious that my comment that the principle behind the French Psalter is

either the iambic, or the trochaic textual scheme, was formulated awkwardly, with resulted in misunderstandings. That is the reason I wrote the following in the *Jaarboek voor de Eredienst van de Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk* ('Yearbook for the Worship Service of the Dutch Reformed Church') 1960:

“The indication of rhythmic patterns in the text, as done by Rev. Wit, is in itself interesting, but it is has not been shown that in the *hymn* the rhythmic structures function thus. What then is the case? Since in French the accent of the word is not related to a certain syllable, the text conforms to the melody. The melodies of the French Psalter count with an alternating scheme, which is shown from the tables of rhythms that are of the foundation of my arguments. [ . . . ]

It might have been useful in this context if I had made a distinction between *accent of the verse* and *accent of the word*. Due to the nature of the French language, not considering the caesura, in French verse the word accent and verse accent fall together by necessity only at the end of a verse, namely with its rhyme. In the middle of a verse this may be omitted without affecting the structure of the verse, which is reflected in the melody. Only the number of syllables is of importance. In that sense I could say that a word like “*place*” can also function as iambic in the French language. [ . . . ]

In the Dutch language the accent of the word is connected to the root of the word. If one wants to leave the French melodies in their original structure as far as possible, it means that is should *allow the preservation of their expressiveness as much as possible*; one should in a Dutch version of the French Psalter follow the rhythm of the *verse* and not of the *word*. Generally speaking this will, therefore, follow an alternating scheme, in which caesura requires some care. [ . . . ]

The exceptions mentioned in my article could then also be seen as incidental cases in which the composer – for whatever reason – followed the rhythm of the word instead of associating with the rhythm of the verse. In light of the nature of the Dutch language these lines especially need to be seriously taken into account.”

My words were taken to heart in the new version of the Psalter that was completed in 1968 – and later was included in its entirety in the *Liedboek voor de Kerken* ['Hymnal for the Churches'] in 1973. In hindsight one of the poets of the *Liedboek* expressed doubt about its correctness. In the *Mededelingen Prof. Dr. G. van der Leeuw-stichting* ['Announcements Prof. Dr. G. van Leeuw-Organization'] p.56 (1982), Ad den Besten published an article with the title 'Beter luisteren; iets over de verhouding van woord en toon in het Liedboek voor de Kerken' ['Better Listening; On the Relationship between Word and Tone in the Hymnal for the Churches']. He expressed the feeling that at times the poets had followed the musicians too slavishly. Especially annoying to him as a poet was the irregular metric treatment of the text in the Psalter with the ten lines of melody, which did not conform to the rhythm of the verse. “We should have done just like Marnix, namely give the Psalms an alternate tune, and no further theatrics,” he wrote in a letter to Wim Kloppenburg. This resulted in an intense discussion in the periodicals *Het Orgel* ('The Organ', transl.) of October 1982 and May 1983 and *Musica Sacra* of October 1982 and in the *Mededelingen van de Prof. Dr. G. van der Leeuwstichting* ['Announcements Prof. Dr. G. van Leeuw-Organization'] 58 of 1983. In the end, I wrote an article in *Het Orgel* ['The Organ'] of November 1983 'Het Ritme van de Geneefse psalmmelodieën', ['The Rhythm of the Genevan Psalm Melodies'] to elaborate on the subject and perhaps be clearer than I have been previously.

The part of the Article that refers to this topic has been included below. In it the first line of Psalm 84 is also discussed, called by Ad den Besten “between Van Biezen and myself perhaps the controversy par excellence.”

# *The Rhythm of the Genevan Psalm Melodies*

Jan van Beizen  
tr. Petra Verwijs

1. In the French versification the starting principle is the counting of syllables. In France there is a distinction between verses of three, four, five, etc. syllables. The counting is ceased with the syllable that is emphasized. Any silent “e” is not counted, however important the distinction between masculine and feminine rhyme is for the form of a strophe. Besides the fixed accent on the rhyme syllable, a fixed accent in the middle of the line is provided with the longer lines of verse. In this way those lines are given a clearer structure. This fixed accent is related to the caesura. A caesura in a long line of verse is at any rate a fixed word boundary after a certain syllable, and most often also the boundary between two groups of words, which may or may not be separated by a reading mark. Now the syllable that precedes the caesura has the indented accent. The Alexandrian, the verse with twelve syllables, always has a caesura after the sixth syllable; the Common Verse, which is the ten-syllable verse, most often has the caesura after the fourth syllable; to verses with less syllables the French poets hardly ever applied a fixed caesura. Besides the obligation to place an emphatic syllable as rhyme syllable and immediately before the caesura, the French poet has freedom to place word accents in the verse. Compare the first strophe of Psalm 1:

|                                             |                          |
|---------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Qui au conseil des malins n'a esté,         | --- /    - - / - - /     |
| qui n'est au trac des pecheurs arrêté,      | --- /    - - / - - /     |
| qui des moqueurs au banc place n'a prise,   | --- /    - / / - - / -   |
| mais nuit et jour la loi contemple et prise | - / - /    - / - / - / - |
| de l'Eternel, et en est desirieux:          | --- /    - - - - - /     |
| certainement celui-la est heureux.          | --- /    - - / - - /     |

These generally very divergent rhythmic patterns, that form the word accents in a verse, I call *textual rhythm*.

2. Besides this there is mention of verse rhythm, which is related to the nature of the French language. In French the accent is not connected to the specific syllable of a word the way it is in the Germanic languages. Compare : "vous allez", "allez-vous" en "allezvousen", of "donnez" en "donnez-le". The result is that the text of the hymn joins effortlessly with the melody. The textual rhythm subjects itself to the rhythm of the melody. The varying rhythmic patterns are reduced to the same denominator by the melody, without it being perceived as impeding. Compare the first strophe of the well-known "Ah! vous dirai-je, maman" (with the same melody as "Altijd is Kortjakje ziek," 'Twinkle Twinkle Little Star', transl.):

*Ah! vous dirai-je, maman, ce qui cause mon tourment! Depuis que j'ai vu Silvandre me regarder d'un oeil tendre, mon coeur dit à chaque instant: peut on vivre sans amant?*

The melodic accentuations of "depuis", "regarder", "d'un oeil" "mon coeur" go against the grain, but are accepted effortlessly. The point is that the composer of French verse seeks to normalize the varied exchanges portrayed by the textual rhythm into a regular sequence of the accented and unaccented syllables. Of course, he has to take into account the obligatory accent attached to the rhyme syllable and caesura syllable. Sometimes this can be accomplished in different ways. The

poet-composer from the Middle Ages, Machaut, melodically conforms the verse common of the first four lines of the strophes in his "Chanson Royal" from "Remède de Fortune" to the scheme

/ - - / || - - / - - / (-),

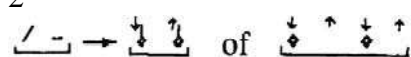
while in other compositions the verse common is melodically represented as

- / - / || - / - / - / (-).


With a strophic hymn the composer is of course forced to melodically bring the generally incompatible text rhythms of the different strophes to the same denominator. It is obvious that he does this as regularly and symmetrically as possible. The now normalized schemes, which we find most often reflected in the melody rhythm of French verse, I call *textual rhythm*.

3. A statistical investigation into the rhythm of the Genevan Psalter melodies shows us that these melodies take into account an alternating verse rhythm (“iambic” or “trochaic”). With the exception of 12 lines out of a total of 1035 lines – or, if we do not include the repeat melodies, 10 lines out of a total of 857 lines – the following applies. If we determine the verse rhythm by marking the preceding syllables as alternately accented and unaccented, the following correspondence between verse rhythm and melody rhythm becomes evident.

1 a. Normal:

2  


3  
 4 b. Sometimes:

  
 (two sequential ternary meters).

c. Sometimes, with the last syllable as closing syllable with toned rhyme:



(a well-known closing formula with melodies in ternary meters)

d. Relatively frequent, with the last syllable as closing syllable with toned rhyme:



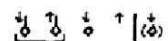
(a closing with high notes with toned rhyme, as syncopal counterpoint to a closing with tenor notes belonging to the regular case).

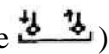
e. Not as frequent, with the last two syllables as toneless rhyme:



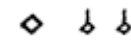

(a closing with high notes with toneless rhyme, as syncopal counterpoint to a closing with tenor notes belonging to the regular case).

f. In some Psalms, at the beginning of a line:



(a syncopal variant of the regular case )

So, the melody rhythm of the Genevan Psalms can thus far be explained as a reflection of an alternating verse rhythm. The musical treatment of the unaccented beginning syllables and the rhyme syllables of a line of verse – there was no place for this in the structure of the scheme mentioned above - does not impair the

argument. Therefore, with the well-known canzonet-rhythm  the long beginning note needs to be understood as a kind of “up-stroke” before a following “down-stroke.” Closing notes continue to fall on the down-stroke of the assumed tactus minor, also with the toneless rhyme. (The movement of the tactus I have reflected above with the arrows, the sign of measure is always ). The accented syllable with the toneless rhyme consistently receives a semibreve.

4. How about the 10 lines of melody that do not fit into the above scheme? It concerns Psalm 13-2, 25-1, 52-1, 61-1, 75-2, 84-1, 131-1 (= 100 & 142), 141-1 and 149-5,6. In all these cases the melodic form is shown to be determined by the textual rhythm of the first line. For whatever reason, with these lines the composer did not follow the rhythm of the verse, but reflected in the rhythm of the melody the rhythm of the word accents of the

first strophe. (Note that in most cases it concerns the first line of the strophe). This particular phenomenon in the Genevan Psalms is only seen in 1.2% of all lines of melody. It also occurs in later French verse – and in that case significantly more frequent. A good examples is the "Marseillaise". The verse scheme in the stanzas is undoubtedly: - / - / - / - / (-) . But the composer of the well-known melody has obviously not been led by it, but by the textual rhythm of the first strophe, which clearly diverges from the verse rhythm of lines 3, 4, 6 and 8. A renaissance composer would most likely have had lines 3 and 4 sung as:

*Contre nous de la tyrannie,  
l'étendard sanglant est levé.*

For example, to let these lines be sung based on the repetition of the melody for the first two lines. (This can be proved with the customary melody to get a good idea about the flexibility of the French language). The composer of the "Marseillaise" accentuated however in lines 3 and 4:

*Contre nous de la tyrannie,  
l'etendard sanglant est levé.*

In the following strophes, where the rhythmic patterns are different again, the text has to then conform itself to the unusual accentuation. For example, in the fourth strophe it is manifested in lines 3 and 4:

*Liberté, liberté chérie  
combats avec tes défenseurs.*

In this case in line 4 the textual rhythm and melody rhythm diverse before the word with the rhymed syllable, while in this case the textual rhythm is in agreement with the verse rhythm. In line 3 the textual rhythm and melody rhythm agree with each other with the first "liberté," but not with the second "liberté," while with respect to the relationship between textual rhythm and verse rhythm it is exactly reversed. (The above is shown to be correct by the fact that these verses are sung to the first two lines of the traditional melody).

All this is acceptable in French verse.

What is the situation with disputed line of Psalm 84? The verse rhythm is:

- / - / - / - /

The rhythmic forming of the melody is not in agreement:

♩ ↑ ♩ ↑ ♩ ↓ ♩ ↓ ♩ ↓ ♩ ↓ ♩ ↑ ♩ ↓

The first sequence /- is reflected with a ternary meter, without it being compensated with a matching ternary meter as is the case in item b. above. The second sequence /- is represented by two short notes with a movement of tactus that is opposite of the case described in item a above. The last sequence /- is represented by a ternary meter in "second modus," without compensation with an immediately following ternary meter in the "first modus" as seen in item c above. The rhythm of the melody is however totally in accordance with the rhythm of the text of this line in the first strophe of the original text.

O Dieu des armées combien ~ - - - / - - - /

♩ ↑ ♩ ↑ ♩ ↓ ♩ ↓ ♩ ↓ ♩ ↓ ♩ ↑ ♩ ↓

The sequence /- - can, besides with long-short-short, especially before the closing tone also be represented by short-short-long. For those with "modern ears" who think it is strange, compare the possibility that in ternary meter the sequence /- besides being long-short, especially before the closing tone can be represented as short-long – see item c above. Also remember that the French composer is obliged to honor the accent of the rhyme syllable. From this vantage point imagine the posited interpretation of the melody rhythm. The fact that other

strophes show yet another text rhythm in their first line is unimportant for a French hymn: the text conforms to the rhythm of the melody, independent if this rhythm represents the rhythm of the verse or a divergent pattern. What does the above mean for a Dutch Psalter? Well, in Dutch, as well as in other Germanic languages, the word accent is tied to the root of the word. Unlike in French, the danger of friction between textual rhythm and the rhythm of the melody is very real, especially with melodies in which the rhythm is very pronounced, as is the case with the Genevan Psalter. A good example is found with the beginning of Datheen's version of Psalm 42:

Als een hert gejaagd, o Here, dat versè watèr begeert...

[As a hunted deer, O Lord, that desires fresh water . . . , ]

In Dutch textual rhythm and rhythm of melody are expected to fall together a great deal. As has been shown above in item 3, the French Psalm melodies, generally speaking, reflect an alternating *verse rhythm*. An alternating version – preferably taking into account caesuras – does not generally present any problems. Only the ten lines of melody listed in item 4 above are exceptions, and require extra care. In these cases, if one wants to preserve the original declamatory power of the melodies and avoid collisions between word and tone, one needs to conform to the French *textual rhythm* that underlies the form of the melody.