



VERSE & VOICE

in BYRD's SONG
COLLECTIONS
of 1588 and 1589

Jeremy L. Smith

Verse and Voice in Byrd's Song Collections of 1588 and 1589

Jeremy L. Smith

THE BOYDELL PRESS

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Preface and Acknowledgements

IN the late-1970s, with Joseph Kerman and Oliver Neighbour, Philip Brett designed *The Music of William Byrd* to give meaning to the “commonplace” that Byrd’s music rested on a “plane with the greatest masters of later years” and to “lay the foundation for its fuller understanding and appreciation.”¹ Although Kerman’s and Neighbour’s books were published some thirty years ago and are now classics, Brett’s untimely death in 2002 left incomplete this lofty project to subject all of Byrd’s works to a searching and thorough appraisal. Brett planned to cover the composer’s entire English-texted repertory. The present volume initiates an effort to resume this unfinished work, beginning here with the songs Byrd published in 1588 and 1589.

Although known to be “distinctly English” and on a par aesthetically with Byrd’s efforts in other genres, these particular songs have been plagued for some time by a persistent but inappropriate comparison to the better-known Italianate English madrigal. My initial intent was to address this problem, as I believed it would have been a significant part of Brett’s agenda. As I pursued the matter further I discovered, however, that Brett and others had already shown how little the consort song was diminished by the madrigal vogue of the day. Setting out with a decidedly different approach for meshing music and poetry, Byrd, as Brett, Kerman, and Neighbour all eloquently revealed, captured the true essence of the verses he set, all the while communicating feelings of great depth and expressing religious and political views of profound moment. Thus well-summarized accounts of Byrd’s accomplishment are readily available and have already made their mark; and Byrd’s skill at song composition was something his contemporaries must have appreciated too, given the influence of his collections and their treatment at the press. The task at hand seemed then to be to work out the details.

Once into the project, however, a new problem began to emerge. For if Byrd was a sensitive reader and his music well expressed ideas of a given verse, then it would seem necessary to search out Byrd’s interaction with some of the preeminent figures of England’s greatest literary period: Edmund Spenser, Sir Philip Sidney, and Shakespeare, among others. That “song” *per se* was considered the common property of the poetic as well as the musical “maker” of this time made the investigation of the question of Byrd’s place in the literary world seem all the more pressing. Furthermore, if Brett and Kerman had already provided a view of Byrd, the avowed, recusant Catholic, as an important cultural figure in the religious politics of the day, they had done so mainly from the perspective of his Latin works. Left unstudied along with a number of the songs themselves was the question of what Byrd might choose to express in his native language.

Byrd, it turns out, had special designs for his first two publications of song. In his 1588 and 1589 collections he drew his auditor slowly but steadily, not only into a rich and coherent musical world but also into a work of literary and cultural

¹ Joseph Kerman, *The Masses and Motets of William Byrd* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1981), 9–10; Oliver Neighbour, *The Consort and Keyboard Music of William Byrd* (Boston and London, 1978), 9–10.

significance, all guided by a political message. Like the writers around him, Byrd was particularly attuned to the interdisciplinary aspect of song, and this encouraged me to treat his works as literary and cultural as well as musical phenomena, and thus as expressions of “verse” as well as “voice,” in all its musico-poetic and political dimensions.

There are many I wish warmly to thank for their generous assistance and guidance in my research and writing. In 2005 Richard Turbet and Richard Rastall organized a conference at Leeds University to address the lack of a volume dedicated to Byrd’s English-texted works in *The Music of William Byrd* project. In addition to the stimulating papers of this two-day event, I later profited from the expert advice of both conference organizers. Richard Turbet and Kerry McCarthy generously read several early chapter drafts, offering many excellent suggestions. I also benefited greatly from the anonymous reader of *Early Music* and the reviewer of the present manuscript. To the latter I owe the title of the present work, along with much else. Any errors that remain are of course my own responsibility.

In resolving issues in my research on Byrd I have come more and more to rely on the wisdom and advice of Elizabethan music specialists David Mateer and Jessie Ann Owens. I also wish warmly to thank a number of scholars from various fields: Leofranc Holfred-Strevens, Christopher A. Jones, Andrew Johnstone, John Milsom, Victor Houlston, and William Race, all who kindly and effectively helped me deal with complex matters ranging from churching rites to Chrism Masses, Thomasine ethics, and priamels. I owe a great debt of gratitude to all the students of my research seminars over the past five years, including Gabrielle Dietrich, Hunter Ewen, Ross Hagen, Michael Harris, Karyn Dawn Grapes, Michael Ward, and Sienna Wood, who opened my eyes to special aspects of Byrd’s work. Carlo Caballero, Elizabeth Farr, Elissa Guralnick, Jay Keister, Daphne Leong, Rebecca Maloy, Yonatan Malin, Austin Okigbo, Robert Shay, and Keith Waters are music colleagues of mine at the University of Colorado, Boulder (CU) who deserve my thanks for engaging with me in prolonged discussions relating to Byrd’s music, religion, politics, and poetics. My interest in interdisciplinary studies was sparked and nurtured through my position as a board member and director of the CU Center for British and Irish Studies. Through its auspices I beneficially worked with a number of Elizabethan specialists, including the eminent screenwriter Michael Hirst and a fellow Mary Queen of Scots specialist, Susan Frye of the University of Wyoming. Special thanks are due to CU literary and political historians Shirley Carnahan, Paul E. J. Hammer, William Kuskin, and Richelle Munkoff. I warmly thank in particular my co-teachers of “Elizabeth I and her Times,” Katherine Eggert, Marjorie McIntosh, and Jim Symons. It was a true privilege to work with Caroline Palmer, Rob Kinsey, Katherine Puffett, and Nick Bingham of Boydell. On a more personal note, the baristas at Amantes of North Boulder well deserve my thanks for so graciously hosting me for hours on end and for their superb chai. Finally, heartfelt, loving thanks are due to my parents, Nate and Jeanne, my wife SoYoung Lee, and, my son, Michael, not only for their support, but also for major contributions to my research and writing, of which they are all well aware. Their patience with me as I slowly cleared the way for upcoming work on a prospective television dramatic series “The Byrd’s Nest” has been well noted.

Editorial Conventions

NOTE ON BYRD'S SONGS AND TEXTS

THROUGHOUT this study I will refer to Byrd's songs and other works according to their titles and ordering in *The Byrd Edition*, gen. ed. Philip Brett, 17 vols. (London: Stainer & Bell, 1977-2004), hereafter BE. I have quoted the texts of Byrd's 1588 and 1589 songs in their original spellings, based on transcriptions in BE 12, pp. xvi-xxxvi and BE 13, pp. xix-xxxi. The complete texts of the 1588 and 1589 songs with modernized spelling are shown on the music pages of BE 12 and 13, and can be read in a continuous sequence in the third edition of *English Madrigal Verse, 1588-1632*, ed. Edmund H. Fellowes, pp. 32-70 (see Select Bibliography).

NOTE ON TRANSCRIPTIONS

IN quoted texts throughout this study I have silently replaced the long "j" with the modern "s," as well as the consonantal "u" with "v," and the consonantal "i" with "j," on occasion. Otherwise, I have preserved writings from the Byrd era in their original spellings.

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Introduction

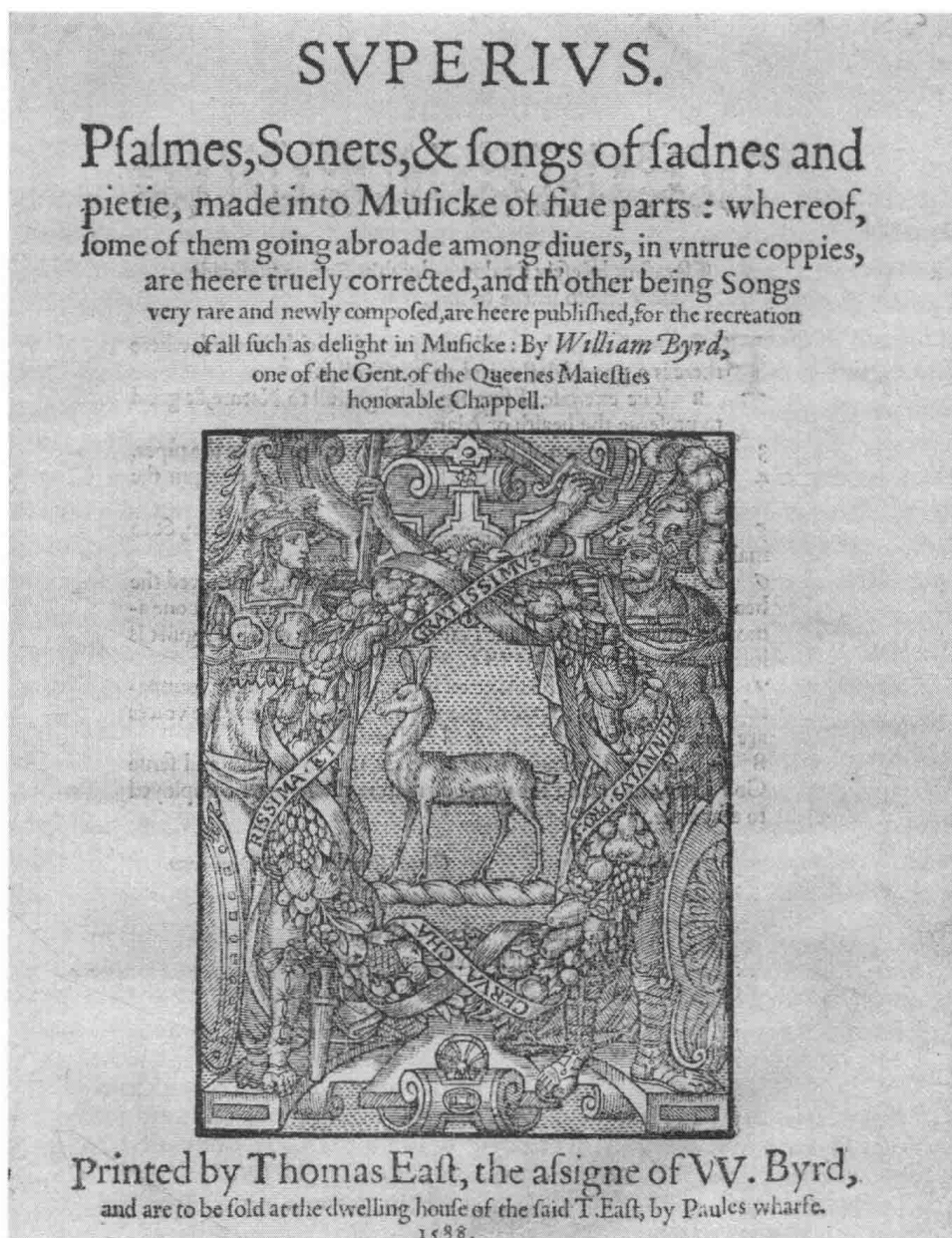
IN 1588, the year of England's triumph over the formidable Spanish Armada, a Catholic composer, William Byrd (c. 1540–1623) – the leading figure in the Queen's Protestant chapel – brought out a collection of thirty-five songs he entitled *Psalmes, Sonets, & songs* (BE 12).¹ Within the next three years he would also publish, along with two impressive sets of Latin-texted motets, an additional forty-seven numbered English-texted *Songs of sundrie natures* (BE 13) (see Figs. 1 and 2). Byrd was not the first Elizabethan composer to venture into print with a set of songs. Thomas Whythorne published his *Songes for Three, Fower, and Five voyces* in 1571.² Furthermore, by 1588, Byrd, with his illustrious fellow gentleman of the Chapel Royal, Thomas Tallis, had already produced a grand set of Latin-texted works in their joint *Cantiones ... sacrae* (of 1575), a volume wherein the two composers announced a patent for music printing (along with printed ruled music paper and music importation) Elizabeth awarded to them that year.³ By the late 1580s, then, Byrd had long ago placed his works on the same bookstalls where his countrymen had already encountered music with English texts. But Byrd's first printed songs still marked a significant moment in the transition from manuscript culture to an ever-increasing role for print in the era's musico-poetic world.

Having served in the Queen's chapel from 1572 onward, in one capacity or another, Byrd was in close enough contact with other members of the court to obtain the works of its most famous literary figures, including Sir Walter Raleigh, Edward de Vere, the

¹ On the Chapel Royal and music see Craig Monson, "Elizabethan London," in *The Renaissance: From the 1470s to the End of the 16th Century*, ed. Iain Fenlon (London, 1989), 304–40; Fiona Kisby, "'When the King Goeth a Procession': Chapel Ceremonies and Services, the Ritual Year, and Religious Reforms at the Early Tudor Court, 1485–1547," *Journal of British Studies* 40 (2001): 44–75; and Roger Bowers, "The Chapel Royal, the First Edwardian Prayer Book, and Elizabeth's Settlement of Religion, 1559," *Historical Journal* 43 (2000): 317–44. For the composer's most recent biography see Kerry McCarthy, *Byrd, Master Musicians Series* (Oxford, 2013); on his stature during his lifetime and thereafter see Suzanne Cole, "Who is the Father? Changing Perceptions of Tallis and Byrd in Late Nineteenth-Century England," *Music & Letters* 89 (2008): 212–26.

² Although they have been "strangely neglected" for some time, Katie Nelson offers a welcome reassessment of Whythorne's (autobiographical) songs, which, at times, "convey messages [about love] that were too dangerous to be spoken." See "Love in the Music Room: Thomas Whythorne and the Private Affairs of Tudor Music Tutors," *Early Music* 40 (2012): 15–26, at 22.


³ See BE 1 and William Byrd and Thomas Tallis, *Cantiones sacrae, 1575*, ed. John Milsom, *Early English Church Music* 56 (London, 2014). On the music patent see Donald W. Krummel, *English Music Printing 1553–1700* (London, 1975), 15–17; Iain Fenlon and John Milsom, "'Ruled Paper Imprinted': Music Paper and Patents in Sixteenth-Century England," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 37 (1984): 139–63; Jeremy L. Smith, "Print Culture and the Elizabethan Composer," *Fontes artis musicae* 48 (2001): 156–72; and idem, *Thomas East and Music Publishing in Renaissance England* (New York, 2003).




1 Byrd, *Psalmes, Sonets, & songs*, title page

seventeenth Earl of Oxford, Sir Edward Dyer, and, most prominently, Sir Philip Sidney, almost none of whose "courtier poems" had been published before Byrd brought them into print in his musical settings (see Fig. 3).⁴ Scholars have often remarked in

⁴ For an edition of representative poems as well as a stringent definition of the often loosely used term "courtier poet" see Steven W. May, *The Elizabethan Courtier Poets: Their Poems and Their Contexts* (Columbia, MO, 1991); for settings of Byrd's courtier poetry evaluated alongside those of his younger contemporary



SVPERIVS.



¶ Songs of sundrie natures, some of
grauitie, and others of myrth, fit for all compa-
nies and voyces. *Lately made and composed in-
to Musick of 3. 4. 5. and 6. parts: and pub-
lished for the delight of all such as take
pleasure in the exercise of
that Art.*

By VVilliam Byrd, one of the Gentlemen
of the Queenes Maiesties honorable
Chappell.



¶ Imprinted at London by Thomas
*Este, the assigne of William Byrd, and are to bee
sold at the house of the sayd T. Este, beeing in
Aldersgate streere, at the signe of the
blacke Horse. 1589.*

Cum priuilegio Regiæ Maiestatis.

2 Byrd, *Songs of sundrie natures*, title page

John Dowland see Kirsten Gibson, "John Dowland and the Elizabethan Courtier Poets," *Early Music* 41 (2013): 239–53; see also idem, "The Order of the Book: Materiality, Narrative and Authorial Voice in John Dowland's *First Booke of Songes or Ayres*," *Renaissance Studies* (2012): 13–33. Byrd's sets, I hasten to note, were not made up entirely of courtier poems nor were they exclusively courtly. Nonetheless, whether this was the result of circumstance or intent, throughout his song collections, and in manuscripts as well, the composer left undeniable evidence of an extraordinarily high level of access to those poets of highest rank who were closest to the Queen.



3. Philip Sidney, c. 1576

passing that Byrd's songs were likely to have been courtly in nature at this stage of his career.⁵ His published sets offer us, in fact, a rare glimpse into the interdisciplinary activities of some of the era's finest poets and musicians serving the Queen.

Philip Brett, who did more than anyone else to establish the musical significance of Byrd's achievement in these songs, once suggested that Byrd's works

⁵ The point is usually well noted but left undeveloped. See, for example, John Harley, *William Byrd: Gentleman of the Chapel Royal* (Aldershot, 1997), 277: "some at least of Byrd's consort songs must have been composed for the court."