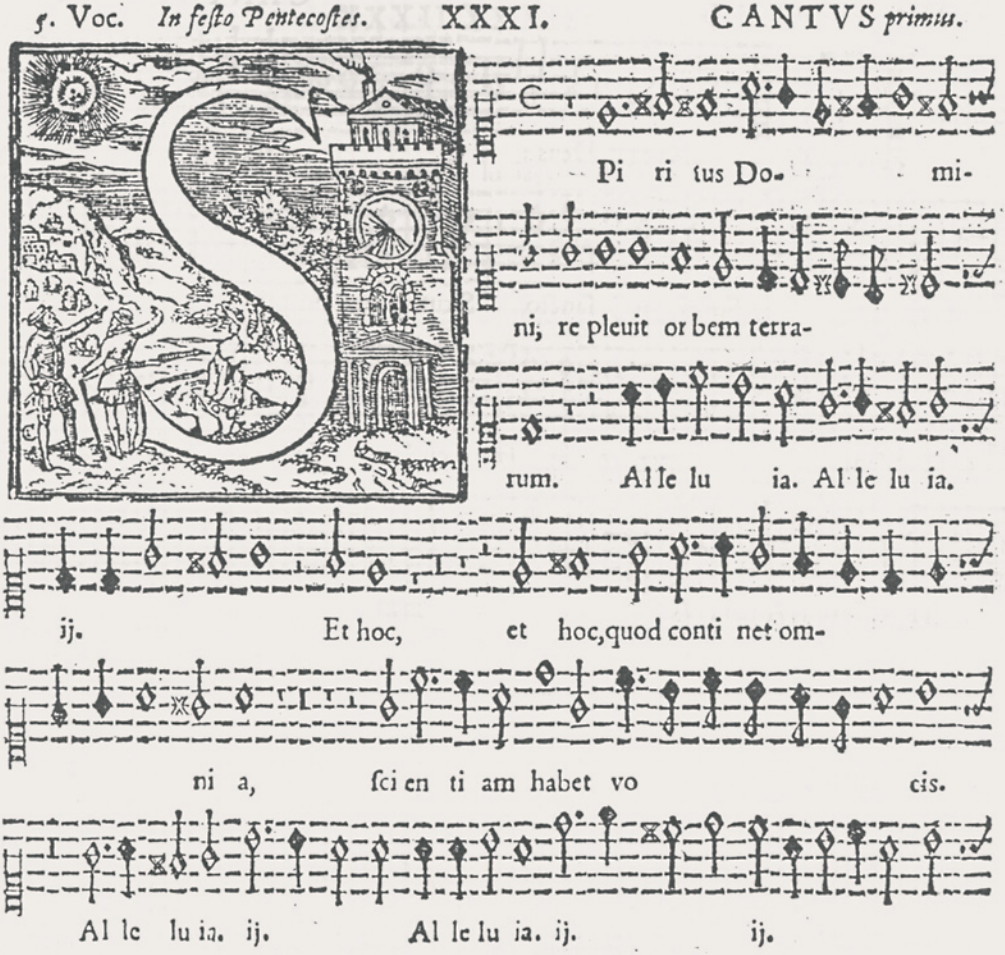
Liturgy and Contemplation in Byrd's Gradualia



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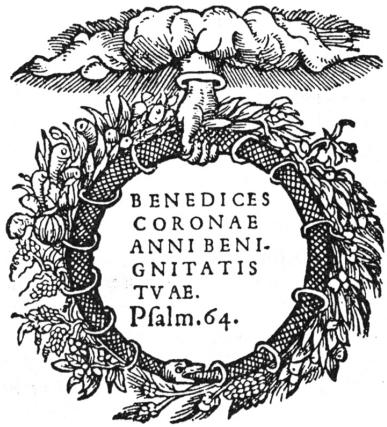

Sixteenth-century allegory of the liturgical cycle: "You bless the crown of the year with your goodness."

Liturgy and Contemplation in Byrd's Gradualia

Kerry McCarthy

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Byrd once wrote that the "expressing well" of his music in performance "is the life of our labours." For many years now, the musicians at the annual Byrd Festival in Portland, Oregon, have been committed to the repertoire—both familiar and unfamiliar—and to exquisite music-making. For this, and for first encouraging my interest in English polyphony, I am grateful to Dean Applegate, Richard Marlow, and Cantores in Ecclesia, who have followed Byrd's example by thriving in unfortunate political circumstances.

John and Susan Altstatt welcomed me into their household during the process of writing and revision. Their hospitality is written into every page of this book.

My greatest debt is to William Mahrt, *vray trésorier*, who taught me (as Ignatius might have put it) to think with the liturgy.

This volume is dedicated to the memory of Philip Brett (1937–2002), who inspired so much of it and would doubtless have been its most critical and insightful reader.

Introduction

William Byrd, in one of his dedicatory prefaces, left us some remarks on how he wrote sacred music: "In the words themselves (as I have learned from experience) there is such hidden and mysterious power that to a person thinking over divine things, diligently and earnestly turning them over in his mind, the most appropriate measures come, I do not know how, and offer themselves freely to the mind that is neither idle nor inert."[1]

At first glance this sentence seems to apply best to his three collections of motets, the *Cantiones sacrae* published between 1575 and 1591. Byrd spent this period of his life in a direct search for, and response to, verbal inspiration. The search led him through Savonarola, Augustine, the darker corners of the Scriptures, a variety of freely composed texts, and—when it suited him—the traditional Latin liturgy.[2] He chose words for their emotional force, for their imagery, for their political connotations, or for whatever else invited a creative response. When he had chosen them, he set them colorfully, sometimes at great length. His selection and manipulation of subject matter during these years was itself an art. The three books of *Cantiones* and a number of similar motets surviving in manuscript bear witness to this fact. As Joseph Kerman has noted, Byrd "takes texts as he wants them" for this music, and he interprets them as he sees fit.[3]

Byrd's note on the "hidden and mysterious power" of sacred words does not come from any of these motet books. He wrote it many years later, in the preface to the first volume of his *Gradualia*. This is a large collection of music, 109 pieces in all, mostly for the celebration of Mass on the major feast days of the Roman church year. It includes the famous and ancient festivals (Christmas, Easter, Pentecost), a number of pointedly Catholic holidays (Corpus Christi, All Saints' Day, the Assumption of Mary), and a variety of other seasonal observances. Byrd published it in two installments, the first in 1605 and the second in 1607. He worked on it through a violent political crisis in England and the oncoming rush of modernity. The *Gradualia* cycle was completed in the same year that saw William Shakespeare's *King Lear*, Claudio Monteverdi's pioneering opera *Orfeo*, and the founding of Jamestown, the first permanent English colony in the New World.[4] It was the product of Byrd's ripe middle age, after he had left his public role at court and turned his attention to music for the Catholic liturgy—which was forbidden in England at the time, punishable by heavy fines, imprisonment, or even (in rare cases) death.

The so-called proper of the Mass is an elaborate network of brief sentences, mostly drawn from scripture, designed to comment on and adorn the events

of the liturgical year. Each day in the church calendar comes with its group of five or six predetermined texts, to be sung or said at various points during the Mass: the entrance procession, the reflective pause between scriptural readings, the offertory, the communion. These words are not negotiable: a composer at the service of this liturgy cannot pick and choose them to suit his taste. Rossini once claimed—though the story may be apocryphal—to be able to set his own laundry list to beautiful music. Byrd himself has attracted some sympathy from readers who saw him spending his mature years working over a long series of Latin fragments along the lines of "Quotiescunque manducabitis." In his study of the *Gradualia*, Kerman sometimes associates less successful music with less colorful texts, or commiserates with Byrd for having to set words without easily accessible mood or imagery:

> A composer might well regard the text of *Quodcunque ligaveris* (1607/44) as a joyless challenge rather than any kind of stimulus. . . . In "expressive" terms the words at this point are negligible.[5]

> The other texts are relatively neutral and so is Byrd's music for them.[6]

> Byrd may have been bored with text setting, but his purely musical imagination was as busy as ever.[7]

> The texts of the Corpus Christi Mass, returning as they do again and again to the ingestion of the body, blood, bread, meat, honey and wheat flour, are not ideally calculated for musical setting. Byrd is perhaps more to be congratulated for providing striking settings of the offertory and communion than blamed for writing, in the introit and gradual-alleluia group, music in a light polyphonic style that is deft, concise, and rather vacant in character.[8]

When he decided to begin composing Mass propers, Byrd faced, voluntarily and for the first time in his life, a large amount of material "not ideally calculated for musical setting." It was in precisely this context that he first wrote about the power of the sacred words, the "sentences themselves," to evoke a creative response. The key to a more profound understanding of this music is in fact a simple question, around which this book revolves: How did Byrd read and interpret the texts of his Latin liturgical works?

Chapter 1 of this volume deals briefly with the background of the *Gradualia*: the European tradition of polyphonic Mass proper settings and Byrd's own artistic biography as it evolved into the early seventeenth century. Very few composers before him had set the Mass proper at such length. The handful of previous attempts were mostly sponsored by world-class musical establishments such as the Cathedral of Notre Dame or the court of the Holy Roman Emperor. It is surprising to see Byrd taking on this sort of project in a rural backwater of Jacobean England, where it was strictly illegal to use the music as

he intended it. We are fortunate to have direct evidence of his own ideals and intentions through more than thirty years' worth of first-person dedicatory prefaces. His famous remark on inspiration quoted above is in fact only one among many similar statements in his notes to the two volumes of *Gradualia*. These late prefaces, quite unlike his earlier ones, reveal two major interests: the habit of reflecting at length on sacred texts and an almost exaggerated concern for their ceremonial function.

I address the first of these two interests in chapter 2. Byrd's approach to text setting, as described in his own words, has direct parallels in numerous Counter-Reformation practices of meditation and devotional reading, especially those promoted by the Jesuit order. England was inundated at the turn of the seventeenth century with tireless Jesuit missionaries teaching layfolk how to meditate ("like locusts all over," as one exasperated Protestant commentator described them) and by printed instructions on how to contemplate sacred words, from the simplest devotional picture books to the most refined treatises.[9] There is ample illustration here of how an educated English Catholic of Byrd's day was likely to "think about divine things and turn them over attentively and earnestly in his mind." Many of the surviving sources have direct parallels in his sacred music.

The content of the *Gradualia* reflects above all the other main theme of Byrd's later prefaces: the pervasive English Catholic concern with correct liturgical practice. Chapter 3 examines contemporary views of the Mass (in particular the Mass proper) and the annual cycle of feast days. I draw on a variety of evidence here, from first-person testimonies and court records to polemical books and tracts. Byrd's coreligionists turned to the events of the church year both when defining their community against outside forces and when building up their own faith. Under their influence, Byrd also turned from the common topics of many of his earlier motets (with their focus on captivity, pain, and lamentation) to begin a positive project on a scale not seen even in pre-Reformation England, much less in beleaguered dissident circles.

Chapters 4 and 5 revisit the music itself, both its structure and its detail, in view of all the above. Given the internal evidence of the *Gradualia*, and Byrd's likely chronology in composing it, it is clear that that he wrote with his eye on larger liturgical and contemplative narratives as well as on individual Mass proper sets and single pieces of music. When we study his approach to different genres (how does, for example, each introit function as the rhetorical introduction of its set?) and liturgical events (how does he create a musical and emotional trajectory through a given day's proper texts, or through a given section of the year?), the entire collection falls into place as a complex—yet coherent—whole.

The present volume makes no claim to be either a systematic piece-by-piece analysis of the entire *Gradualia* cycle or a comprehensive account of its production and print run. Readers seeking the former should turn to Kerman's

extensive chapter in *The Masses and Motets of William Byrd*. Those interested in the latter are well served by Philip Brett's prefaces and notes to the five relevant volumes of the new *Byrd Edition*, recently re-edited and published under separate cover by the University of California Press.[10] The purpose of this book is simply to follow some specific cultural and intellectual threads through Byrd's Latin liturgical works, and to dig deeper into the milieu that inspired those works. It also offers a case study of how one composer reimagined the creative process in the final decades of his life.

Any project of this kind will necessarily involve a fair amount of nonmusical evidence. I ask the reader's temporary indulgence if it appears at times to be drifting far from the central topic of Byrd and his music. This volume draws on a number of sources, some of them rather unlikely material for a work of musicology, but all of which combine to shed some light on what was itself a complicated social and spiritual context. "If I seem to be digressing unconscionably," as Mary Carruthers asks of her readers in the preface to her magisterial book on medieval techniques of memory, "I hope they will bear with me until we come back to the main subject, enriched in understanding."[11] It is my hope that this book will do something to enrich the understanding of what Byrd called his "swan song," a unique work and among the greatest artistic monuments of the Counter-Reformation.[12]

1
The *Gradualia* Cycle
Genre and Presentation

The Renaissance music theorist Johannes Tinctoris sorted the polyphonic music of his day into three categories:

> A Mass is a large piece of music, to which the words Kyrie, Et in terra, Patrem, Sanctus, and Agnus, and sometimes other parts, are set to be sung by several voices: others call this the Office.
>
> A motet is a moderate-sized piece of music, to which any sort of words are set, but most often sacred.
>
> A song is a small piece of music, to which any sort of words are set, but most often amatory.[1]

This simple scheme can be traced back to the ancient hierarchy of literary genres and, more directly, to Cicero's three *genera dicendi* or levels of rhetoric.[2] Just as classical poetry falls into various categories (epic, lyric, pastoral), and classical rhetorical style into various degrees of elaboration (grand, moderate, humble), so musical compositions are either large (*magnus*), middle-sized (*mediocris*), or small (*parvus*).[3] The polyphonic Mass enjoyed the place of honor among Renaissance musicians, as the epic poem had among the ancient Greeks and Romans, for both aesthetic and ideological reasons. It accompanied the most important ritual act in Christian society, and it was adorned with the most complex and varied techniques available to composers.[4] Tinctoris's definition of the genre includes not only the five well-known Mass movements—Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus, and Agnus—but *interdum caeterae partes*, "sometimes other parts." By "other parts" he meant the constantly varying proper of the Mass, the pieces that change from one day to the next: the introit, offertory, and communion, along with some combination of gradual, alleluia, tract, and sequence, according to the season and the importance of the occasion. These proper items are interwoven with the Mass ordinary and are equally vital to the order of the service. William Byrd devoted most of his two volumes of *Gradualia* to music of this sort.[5]

The tradition of setting Mass propers "to be sung by several voices" is nearly as old as polyphony itself and includes some of the most intricate music of the Western polyphonic tradition. Perhaps most notable is the medieval

repertoire of the *Magnus liber organi*, which began life in the later twelfth century at the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris and was eventually transmitted as far afield as Spain and Scotland.[6] The *Magnus liber* sets the solo portions of numerous graduals and alleluias to polyphony. These two pieces, the most elaborate in the chanted Mass proper, are sung together as a reflective interlude between the epistle and the gospel; their opening intonations and verses are traditionally assigned to skilled cantors, which makes them an obvious choice for multivoiced settings. The series of Notre Dame graduals and alleluias covers the medieval calendar in a systematic way, set out according to the order and liturgical rank of each occasion. Craig Wright has compared this music to other great works of an era that admired hierarchy, intellectual order, and the pursuit of encyclopedic knowledge: "That a single individual might attempt to apply polyphonic music to the liturgy on a systematic basis for all the major feasts of the Church year is harmonious with the tenor of the age. The one hundred or so organa in the *Magnus liber organi* of Leoninus constituted no less a *summa musicae liturgicae* than . . . the *Summa* of Aquinas."[7]

Despite the formidable precedent of the *Magnus liber*, there was no similar tradition of polyphonic Mass propers in the later Middle Ages. The strictures of Pope John XXII's early-fourteenth-century decree *Docta sanctorum*, which banned (at least in theory) all but the simplest liturgical polyphony, could hardly have helped reverse this decline.[8] When the genre began to resurface in the fifteenth century, it did so only in certain circumstances. Polyphonic settings of the Mass ordinary flourished in almost every place with sufficient resources to support them. Proper settings were rare by comparison. The main reason was, of course, a practical one: the five movements of the ordinary are fixed and suitable for almost any liturgical occasion, but the proper is specific to a single event in the calendar, which makes it something of an extravagance rather than a practical addition to a choir's everyday repertoire. Given the resources and labor needed to produce polyphonic music, especially before the easy availability of print, it is no surprise that composers and their patrons turned away from constantly varying texts in favor of unchanging ones.

The existing repertoire of Mass proper cycles in the Renaissance can be split roughly into two categories, divided by the liturgical reforms during (and, to some extent, preceding) the mid-sixteenth-century Council of Trent. One of the most important changes at the Counter-Reformation was a radical pruning of votive Masses, various services sung *ad libitum* in place of the usual Mass of the day. The Tridentine decrees restored the existing calendar of feast days to primary status, eliminating many votive Masses and restricting the use of the remaining ones. This was a major departure from late medieval custom. Up to the early sixteenth century, the Mass proper for Pentecost, Trinity, or even Easter was often adopted for the ordinary Sundays during the year; the Virgin Mary was traditionally commemorated on Saturday, the Holy Cross on Friday, and the Eucharist on Thursday; the Requiem Mass was, of course,

ubiquitous. Fifteenth-century manuscripts such as Trent 88, which transmit polyphonic votive cycles rather than systematic settings for the liturgical year, offer an accurate snapshot of the church's priorities at the time they were compiled.[9] Musicians also had pragmatic reasons to concentrate on votive offices at the expense of individual feast days, just as they preferred the more stable Mass ordinary over the less stable Mass proper. Votive music could be recycled once a week, or even more frequently, while music for a particular festival was limited by the demands of the annual calendar.

Almost all of the few surviving proper settings from pre-Reformation England were intended for votive Masses—more precisely for the *Missa Salve*, or Lady Mass, the regular commemoration of the Virgin that was a staple of English choral foundations. The Lady Mass in the Sarum liturgy was provided with a different alleluia for each day of the week, which became a favorite place for polyphonic elaboration. Despite the wholesale destruction of English liturgical materials in the course of the sixteenth century, there are extant alleluia settings by a number of early Tudor composers: Nicholas Ludford, John Sheppard, John Taverner, and even the young Thomas Tallis.[10] The tradition eventually resurfaced with Byrd, whose *Gradualia* includes a full set of music (though following the Roman missal rather than the Sarum rite) for these votive services.

The Lady Mass was cultivated enthusiastically in England up to the Reformation. Musicians in some other areas of Europe had already started, in the generation before Martin Luther's reforms, to move away from the late medieval emphasis on votive Masses and to concentrate instead on the proper services for Sundays and feast days. The trend toward liturgical integrity gained momentum under the influence of John Burchard, papal master of ceremonies to Innocent VIII and the notorious Alexander VI, who issued a reformed *Ordo Missae* in 1502 as a humanistic tidying-up operation on what he saw as an overgrown liturgy. Burchard's *Ordo* had a considerable impact on its early-sixteenth-century admirers, who started almost at once, especially in German-speaking circles, to cut down on the proliferation of votive offices.[11] Perhaps most noteworthy in this context are the Mass propers set by Heinrich Isaac under the commission of Constance Cathedral and the imperial chapel—a tradition carried on through the sixteenth century by Isaac's student Ludwig Senfl and his successors at the Munich Hofkapelle, up to and including Orlando de Lassus.[12] Manuscript sources such as Jena 30 and Weimar A began to set out the propers of the year in a comprehensive cyclic format.[13] The Lyons *Contrapunctus*, published in 1528 and the first printed book of Mass propers to appear on the European market, is a yet more orderly cycle for major feast days: more than 80 percent of its texts match the contents of the *Gradualia*, and the anonymous composer uses a system of musical transfers similar to the more elaborate one adopted by Byrd.[14] The midcentury series of *Officia* by Mattheus le Maistre is organized in much the same way.[15] Other collections, such

as Costanzo Porta's 1566 *Musica in introitus missarum*—excerpted alongside Byrd's own motets in an Elizabethan manuscript (BL Add. MS 47844)—and Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina's 1593 *Offertoria totius anni*, were devoted to settings of a single Mass proper item, such as the introit or the offertory, for the whole church year.

The Counter-Reformation repertoire of polyphonic propers, like its remote medieval ancestor in the *Magnus liber*, shows a commitment to cultivating and adorning the liturgical year in its full integrity. Such a commitment cost more in the sixteenth century than it had in the twelfth or thirteenth. Unlike the avant-garde urban musical culture of the Parisian cantors, this second wave of interest in the Mass proper could lead composers into an unfashionable cul-de-sac. Musicians of the late Renaissance, intoxicated by new possibilities of both sacred and secular expression, were not the most likely candidates for turning out large, often repetitive, and usually chant-based collections of liturgical polyphony. A real interest in ritual propriety, whether the patron's interest or the composer's, was one of the few things that could inspire a shift from overtly affective material to the systematic grind of the large-scale liturgical cycle. David Fallows notices a similar change in perspective during Guillaume Dufay's residence at Cambrai in the 1440s, where he wrote the Mass propers preserved in Trent 88: "After a youth of display and, one is bound to add, musical arrogance, he appears to have tried to consolidate and to adopt a plainer, more devotional style, conceivably for a grand project of music for the Mass and Office."[16] The comment would be equally true if Byrd's name were substituted for Dufay's.

Nothing about Byrd's early career suggested he would go on to pursue a "grand project" of this sort. There is little in his earlier work, beyond a few juvenile efforts and a group of settings from the Office of the Dead in the 1575 *Cantiones*, that suggests any interest in systematic liturgical or quasi-liturgical composition. Joseph Kerman notes that the younger Byrd chose ritual texts, when he did, on their own rhetorical merits and not because of their importance in the calendar: he concentrated on "occasions such as Lent. . . and midsummer Sundays; this is not the sort of thing that a liturgically-minded composer spends his time with, as appears from the output of Sheppard and Tallis."[17] Although he must have been familiar with the impressive repertoire of Latin Office polyphony those two composers produced in the 1550s, there is no trace of any similar music for the proper of the Mass. Given the enthusiastic copying activities of scribes such as John Baldwin and Robert Dow, and their remarkable salvage of so much of the Office cycle, it is unlikely that a parallel Mass cycle was passed over entirely in silence.[18] Byrd may even have seen Continental Mass propers at some point—one notable possibility is the group of Porta introits in Add. MS 47844—but there is no evidence that he had contact with any full-scale proper cycles of the kind he went on to write himself.

There is also no real precedent among Byrd's vernacular works. The reformed order of worship left room for freely composed sacred music in the form of the English anthem, but it had no place for specific feast-day pieces of the sort he set in the *Gradualia*. A substantial percentage of the Roman ritual was kept intact by the Reformers, but the Mass proper was not part of it. The eucharistic liturgy in the 1559 *Book of Common Prayer* retained four-fifths of the old Mass ordinary: the Kyrie (as a congregational response to each of the Ten Commandments), the Credo (between the lessons and the sermon), the Sanctus (though with a pointed omission of the Benedictus), and the Gloria (as a post-communion hymn of thanksgiving). The Elizabethan Prayer Book also kept an annual cycle of scripture readings, collects, even "a proper preface, according to the time" for several major feasts and their octaves—but all five items of the old proper cycle were rejected.[19] There must have been few English professional musicians by 1605, whatever their religious beliefs, who even remembered such a tradition.

Barbara Haggh has remarked that full polyphonic cycles of feast-day propers after the time of Dufay were cultivated only at the courts of royalty and Holy Roman Emperors.[20] Her claim is problematic when applied to the *Gradualia* (though Byrd continued to enjoy some level of royal patronage while producing his Latin liturgical music), but her general point remains valid: the polyphonic Mass proper was a luxury item that could only be produced in a supportive atmosphere. This makes Byrd, as a staunch and sometimes beleaguered Catholic in voluntary retirement from court, a doubly unlikely author for such a project. Given the apparent lack of outside precedents, it is useful to turn to the internal evidence of his two *Gradualia* volumes, especially his own statements in the 1605 and 1607 dedicatory prefaces. What did he have to say for himself as he presented this music to the public?

The Evidence of Byrd's Prefaces

Byrd began each of his books with a first-person dedication, to which he often added a note to the reader, or other explanatory material. The only exceptions are the three Mass ordinaries of the 1590s, which seem to have been printed under some political duress and lack even title pages.[21] Byrd's prefaces serve a number of functions. They address the person honored in each collection, mixing the traditional clichés of patronage with occasional flashes of warmth and even intimacy. They speak to the needs of the musicmaking public: Byrd emphasizes (in 1611) the need for thorough rehearsal, explains (in 1605) how to find pieces in the index, and warns (in 1588) that "if there happen to be any iarre or dissonance, blame not the Printer." They also provide a valuable window into his musical and political identity, especially in his later years as a Catholic liturgical composer.

With the rise of single-composer prints in the course of the sixteenth century, musicians began using the dedicatory pages to speak publicly about

themselves and their work. At first these prefaces were written by the printer or compiler; such introductions are common all the way back to Ottaviano Petrucci's *Odhecaton*. No true composers' prefaces survive from the early part of the century. The first one appeared in 1532 with the printed works of Carpentras, and they quickly became a commonplace in music publishing.[22] In a printed collection, the composer was speaking in a more or less indirect manner, through the voice of his music; the first-person dedication was a unique opportunity to address his patron or reader and fashion his own artistic persona in their eyes.

The literary critic Stephen Greenblatt has defined "self-fashioning" as "a characteristic address to the world, a consistent mode of perceiving and behaving."[23] Self-fashioning in early modern England most often involved a highly charged relationship to authority—civil, religious, artistic, or any mixture of the above—and a cultivation of the creative project, most often the written word, as an extension of the self. Greenblatt's case studies from Renaissance England involve both creative artists and religious polemicists, all of whom were embroiled in the same broad set of conflicts that surrounded Byrd. He includes only one Catholic, Henry VIII's ill-fated chancellor Thomas More, who was an admirable but somewhat unrepeatable prototype for religious dissidents of Byrd's generation. It is worth testing the model of active self-fashioning on a later Catholic subject, one who also had a painfully close involvement with a number of conflicting authorities and interests.

What was Byrd's mode of "characteristic address to the world" in his Latin publications? His project may be easier to define in negative terms than in positive ones. The contemporary name for a Catholic loyalist in England, which modern scholarship has taken up, was *recusant*—from the Latin *recusare*, "to refuse." The recusants refused to transfer their allegiance from Rome to the state church, with all that implied in terms of public conformity; they refused to take part in established worship, or be ministered to by the established clergy. The concept of *recusancy*, for better or for worse, defines members of a group in terms of what they will *not* do. Some of the most valuable evidence for the cultural influence of English Catholic musicians (including Byrd) survives in the form of accusations that they were boycotting the activities of the established Church or persuading others to do the same.[24] Byrd's music can easily be defined in terms of protest against, or outrage at, the religious establishment and the climate of persecution in Elizabethan and Jacobean England. It can also be defined in terms of gradual rejection of the public sphere in favor of the private: a broad trajectory leading away from public cathedral and court composition, through politically charged sacred chamber music, to a reclusive later life spent providing for the needs of the Roman liturgy. An examination of Byrd's published prefaces may add something to the more active side of the balance. Even after withdrawing into a milieu marked by clandestine operations and enforced silence, he had a good deal to say to his audience.

The joint presentation of the 1575 Tallis-Byrd *Cantiones* is an unusually blunt piece of self-fashioning.[25] For artists in Elizabethan England, there was no more highly charged relationship to authority than a dedication to the queen herself. Compare Edmund Spenser's fulsome offering of *The Faerie Queene* in terms that Greenblatt describes as "language yoked to the service of a reality forever outside itself": "'To the most high, mightie, and magnificent Empresse renowmed for pietie, vertue and all gratious government Elizabeth by the grace of God Queene of England Fraunce and Ireland and of Virginia, Defendour of the Faith. . . .'"[26] The 1575 motet book likewise addresses her with all possible ceremony and nationalistic zeal. Two prefatory poems by Richard Mulcaster and Ferdinand Richardson dwell on the long-concealed excellence of English music, which has finally (for Elizabeth's pleasure and vindication) come to light in printed form. Mulcaster praises the book as a long-overdue revelation: "Our England once admired the great works of these others [foreign musicians], but always let her own lie hidden. Now, having found leaders in Tallis and Byrd, whom she bore, she allows her offspring to see the light of day." Richardson lists the most renowned composers of the time—Jacobus Clemens non Papa, Alfonso Ferrabosco, Nicolas Gombert, Orlando de Lassus—and laments the absence of "a solitary English name in any printed book" until now, when "Tallis and Byrd. . . direct the printing of their songs, allowing them to be read by others." The composers address Elizabeth as a musical authority in her own right: "compared with the greatest artists, you easily surpass them, whether by refinement of voice or agility of fingers." Given the level of skill among the professionals at the Elizabethan Chapel Royal, this statement could hardly have been offered in total sincerity: it is a flattering tribute to the Queen, who will, they hope, look on their work with favor and encourage further publications. In a poem at the end of each partbook, they present their cause to a different audience with gentler optimism.

The Authors of the Songs to the Reader

We commend these first-fruits to you,
gentle reader, as a woman still weak from childbirth
entrusts her infant to the care of the faithful nurse,
for your esteem will be their milk.
Thus nourished, they will promise a fruitful harvest;
if unfruitful, they will fall by an honorable sickle.

Many of these "first-fruits" appear to have been written specifically for the new book. Other pieces must have been older, especially some of the music included by Tallis, who was seventy at the time of publication and had a substantial portfolio at hand. In the last sentences of their dedicatory preface, the composers hedge on the matter of originality and productivity: "it depends only on the testimony of your good will whether we should go on in this manner [*ulterius in hoc genere progredi*], or end our work with this single volume."

In the dedication of his 1575 *Cantiones*, Byrd first began to articulate in print his own complex relationship to authority. With typical audacity, he started at the top and worked his way down. Of course he could not make public offerings to Catholic dignitaries at such a high level. His younger English contemporary Peter Philips, who had fled to Europe, did in fact dedicate a book of *Cantiones sacrae* to the pope in 1613, denouncing the "discord of heresy" in the most blunt polemical terms. We have good contemporary evidence that Philips's motets were known in Jacobean England, perhaps even in their original printed form: Henry Peacham remarked that he "hath sent us over many excellent songs, as well madrigals as motets," though it is difficult to imagine how the overheated rhetoric of the preface could have escaped Jacobean censors.[27] Byrd could not indulge in a dedication to the pope, or a member of the Jesuit or Vatican hierarchy, for basic reasons of self-preservation. Given the focus of his later publications, and his changing relationship to the authority of his patrons, he would likely not have done so even if it had been politically expedient.

Philip Brett noted in his edition of the 1607 *Gradualia* that Byrd's dedication to the Essex recusant Sir John Petre was "out of step with his usual practice of offering his publications only to the most high and mighty in the land, beginning with the Queen herself in 1575, and working through a list—Hatton, Worcester, Hunsdon, Lumley, Northampton—representing the most powerful or luminous men of the Court."[28] Byrd had hardly exhausted his list by the early seventeenth century; there was no lack of sympathetic courtiers to whom he could dedicate books. His dedications were beginning to change because the focus of his creativity was shifting. The patrons and supporters of the *Gradualia*, unlike the recipients of Byrd's earlier dedications, appear to have been in some degree of direct contact with the production and singing of the music. Byrd's note "to the true lovers of Music" is printed directly alongside the formal preface in the 1605 book. In the 1575 *Cantiones*, the corresponding address to the reading public, begging their approval or at least their honest criticism, comes as a postscript after the last piece. The 1575 preface appeals publicly to the judgment of the Queen; the afterword is directed to the judgment of the musician, scribe, or enthusiast who has absorbed the collection of music and formed an opinion of it from experience, the reader by whose verdict the work ultimately stands or falls. When Byrd returns to the note *ad lectorem* in his first collection of Mass propers, there is less distance between the official recipient of the work and the performer who will be involved in its realization. In the second book of *Gradualia*, Byrd finally transfers even the practical information (such as notes on the feast days provided for and the number of voices in each set) to the main body of the dedicatory preface itself. Such material would have been unthinkable, or at least badly out of place, in the 1575 dedication to Elizabeth.

Byrd's solo volumes of *Cantiones*, published in 1589 and 1591, were conceived on different terms than the 1575 book. He makes the difference clear in his prefaces. These new motet books were part of an intensive publishing drive: two collections each of Latin and English songs within the space of three years, as well as a substantial manuscript of keyboard music prepared under his own supervision. Many of the *Cantiones* had been circulating in various manuscript versions for a decade or more. In his 1589 dedication, Byrd notes the "carelessness of scribes" and complains that numerous faults have crept in.[29] He wanted to edit and preserve his work accurately, and the energy of his publishing effort is almost tangible in the language of the prefaces—above all in the first of the two. The rhetoric here is, understandably, simpler than in the joint dedication to Queen Elizabeth. Byrd casts himself as an editor, an anthologist, and even a craftsman who, before offering his works to the public, wants to "bring them back to the lathe" and refine them. The 1575 book made oblique references to the preexistence and known excellence of the music. Now Byrd explains his intentions in plain language, and refers to the work of correcting manuscript errors and sorting an extensive repertoire of songs that has already been in circulation.[30]

These books of *Cantiones* appeared at the real crossroads of Byrd's professional life. He had been composing "sacred songs" of this sort, intensely personal, expressive Latin works, for at least two decades. His revered teacher and collaborator Thomas Tallis had died just a few years earlier. He would soon turn his back on London public life (along with lengthy penitential motets) and devote a good part of his creative energy to liturgical works. These books are a composer's affectionate retrospective on a world he was about to leave behind. In the 1589 preface, his concern for the integrity of the music shows even through the conventional speech of patronage and publishing. "When some people," he writes, "close to me and of good reputation, noticed recently that certain songs of mine had, through the carelessness of scribes, acquired some errors which had certainly not come from our own little Muse in his manuscripts: they implored me, and finally got me to submit the manuscripts to the press, though not before I had first gone over them and corrected them further. But they were in such a jumble (*farrago*) and so numerous that I thought it better to divide them into several books, as time permitted, and publish each as it was ready."

In the preface to the second book of *Cantiones* in 1591, which is similar to the 1589 preface but even shorter, Byrd refers directly to the act of composition, though still in a retrospective way. This collection is dedicated to one of Byrd's chief patrons, John, Lord Lumley (c. 1534–1609), whose house on the outskirts of London was a renowned center of art and learning. Lumley was a keen amateur musician who built up an extensive music library, including a large collection of Continental sources and the full run of Byrd's printed works.[31] He was also a staunch recusant who had been imprisoned several

times (once in the Tower of London) for his religious nonconformity and his tendency to become involved in unsuccessful Catholic plots.[32] Both of these traits made him an ideal sponsor for a collection of Latin motets. It is even possible that some of the *Cantiones* were composed especially for him and his circle. In his dedication, Byrd makes no attempt to hide the retrospective nature of the print, but he emphasizes his close ties to the household at Nonsuch and the value of artistic patronage that also takes the form of friendship: "Just as crops grow more fruitfully under a temperate sky, so the Muses yield sweeter and more abundant fruits through the kindness of patrons. Therefore, I have thought it fitting to dedicate to you whatever Harmony has, in the past years, suggested either to my mind or to my pen." There is still no mention of the sacred subject matter (much less its Catholic implications) in either of these dedications, although the rather coy circumlocution of the 1575 title ("songs which on account of their subject matter are called sacred") has been replaced in both cases with the more direct *Cantiones sacrae*.

Byrd's last printed works before the *Gradualia*, his three Mass ordinaries of 1592 through 1595, are a special case. Well-advised caution kept him (or his printer) from including even a title page with them, much less a prose introduction, though his name is given clearly at the top of each page of music. Such anonymity was common practice with controversial recusant books. The Jesuit missionaries who came to England in the 1580s obtained license from Rome to print books without the author's name, the publisher's name, or the place of printing. This practice had been explicitly forbidden by the Council of Trent, but the hierarchy recognized the inherent dangers of disseminating Catholic devotional works in England (to say nothing of controversial tracts or propaganda), and they allowed authors and publishers the privilege of remaining anonymous.[33] Byrd must have been aware of the dispensation, but this was the only time he took even partial advantage of it.

The prefaces to his three Masses would in many ways have been the most interesting documents of all. Unfortunately, there is no first-person account of Byrd's transition to a new focus on liturgical forms, as there is for his international debut as a court composer in the mid-1570s or his intensive editorial project in the late 1580s. When looking at his next wave of printing shortly after 1600, we must consider that he may have prefaced his *Gradualia* to some extent with what he could not say a decade earlier.

The dedications to the two volumes of Mass propers bring a change in content as well as in presentation.[34] A number of new topics appear in these later prefaces: extended discussion of the composer's craft; clear references to the sacred and, more specifically, liturgical nature of the music; and emphasis on the text as its foundation and inspiration. The opening lines of the 1605 preface draw us into a different world from that of the motet books:

> The swan, they say, when death approaches, sings more sweetly. However little I have been able to equal the sweetness of that bird in these songs which I have ventured to dedicate to you in my extreme old age, I have had two defences for trying to imitate him. One was the sweetness of the words themselves; the other was your worthiness. For just as it is unfitting to construct a rough work out of an extremely precious material, so the holy words in which are sung the praises of God and the citizens of heaven deserve nothing less than a heavenly harmony, to the extent that we can attain it. Moreover, in the words themselves (as I have learned from experience) there is such hidden and mysterious power that to a person thinking over divine things, diligently and earnestly turning them over in his mind, the most appropriate measures come, I do not know how, and offer themselves freely to the mind that is neither idle nor inert.

Various critics have quoted the famous lines on musical inspiration—the last sentence of the excerpt—for almost a century; what they often neglect is the statement on the worthiness of the sacred words and the importance of setting them in an appropriate fashion. Philip Brett has drawn attention to this earlier passage: "In an expression reminiscent of the rhetoric books, Byrd emphasized the need for high matters to be treated in high style, and expounds the doctrine of decorum central to Renaissance aesthetics."[35] Of course Byrd's acceptance of a "doctrine of decorum" predates the *Gradualia* by several decades. A serious concern for high style can be identified in all of his sacred works, including the English anthems, services, and even domestic devotional songs. A tribute to decorum would have been just as appropriate, with the necessary alterations, in the preface to the 1575 book. At the head of a liturgical collection, where Byrd chose to place it, it is more than a statement on compositional propriety. He is in fact defining the sacred texts proper to the liturgy as the material with which he is working. The comparison can be stated as an analogy: precious raw material is to fine craftsmanship as liturgical text is to fine musical setting. The precious material is a given; Byrd's duty as craftsman or composer is to do it justice. Once he has established the primacy of the text, he only then goes on to discuss his musical reading of it.

He revisits this topic later in the 1605 preface: "With the soundest judgment, Alexander forbade that he should be painted or cast in bronze by anyone but Apelles or Lysippus. Likewise, it was not permitted for me to fulfil my office in any other way but to adorn divine things with the highest art of which I was capable." The phrase *officio satisfacere* ("to fulfil one's office") was a technical term used in contemporary ecclesiastical Latin to mean the carrying out of one's liturgical duty. In 1586, for example, Pope Sixtus V used it when writing about the need for more deacons in the major Roman basilicas: there were so few that they could not "fulfil their duty," and higher-ranking clergy

were being forced to perform the lower-grade liturgical actions that normally belonged to deacons.[36] It is not at all likely (despite the wishful thinking of some twentieth-century enthusiasts) that Byrd was under any kind of ecclesiastical mandate to write music for the Roman rite, although he may well have been actively encouraged in that work by his English Jesuit associates. In any case, he presents himself in both this and the 1607 preface as a person charged with the cultivation of the liturgy. He himself described the 1605 *Gradualia* as his "night-labors, which I do not call such falsely," and the sense of urgency and hard work persists throughout both prefaces.

The 1605 book also includes an "address to the reader," which is worth reprinting here in its entirety:

> Noble and upright men, who find it agreeable at times to sing hymns and spiritual songs to God, here are published for your exercise the Offices of the whole year which are appropriate to the most important feasts of the Blessed Virgin Mary and of All Saints, along with some additional songs for five voices with their texts drawn from the fount of sacred writings. In addition there is also the office for the feast day of Corpus Christi, along with the more solemn antiphons of the same Blessed Virgin and other songs of this kind for four voices, and also all the hymns composed for the praise of the Virgin. Finally, here are various songs for three voices set appropriately for the feast of Easter. So that these songs might be arranged, each in its own place according to the various parts of the office, I have appended at the conclusion of the book a special index in which all those appropriate to the same feasts, though they differ in their number of voices, will easily be found listed together. If I have given these holy words (as I have wished to do, and as they themselves demand) notes not entirely inappropriate, let the honor be God's, as is just, but the pleasure be yours. However that may be, judge justly and well, and commend me to God in your prayers. Farewell.

In the 1575 *Cantiones*, he and Tallis had addressed a short poem to the readers, asking their fair judgment on the music. Thirty years later, Byrd is making a similar request to "judge justly and well," but according to different criteria: "if I have given these holy words (as I have wished to do, and they themselves demand) notes not entirely inappropriate." The action to be judged is now the appropriate setting of the words, even more than the composition per se. Byrd's concern for ritual order is clearest here. These are practical notes on how to fit the music to the needs of the Mass and Office, offering it to the readers *pro vestra exercitatione*—literally "for your exercise." This is hardly a term associated with the leisured cultivation of chamber music, even religious chamber music. In fact, it was the term used by his Jesuit contemporaries to describe the process of meditation in the *Spiritual Exercises*, another long, systematic journey through the events of the liturgical year.[37]

In the introduction to the second book of *Gradualia*, Byrd restates the two prevailing themes of the first preface—primacy of the text and concern for the liturgy—even more explicitly. "My spirit," he writes, "mindful of its fidelity, duty, and devotion to God, burns to leave behind for posterity in at least some way a grateful soul's public testimony, crediting all to the Creator. Therefore, in this, my advanced age, being committed to the divine service, I have set out (although unworthy and unequal to the task) to add notes as a garland to certain holy and delightful phrases of the Christian rite."

He presents himself in this excerpt not just as wanting to "fulfil his office," as in the 1605 dedication, but as "being committed to the divine service" (*divino cultui inserviens*.) The verb *inservire* has an additional set of connotations beyond its root word *servire*: this intensified form means to serve, indeed to be a slave to, but it implies "devotion to" or "attachment to" as well. *Inservire* is also the technical term used to describe the person who serves at Mass, that is, who performs the complementary duties to the priest and speaks or sings the responses.[38] As in the parallel statement from the first *Gradualia* preface, Byrd's self-presentation as a composer resonates with the contemporary language of liturgical practice. It is also noteworthy that he presents his work here as a "public testimony," even though it was written for a forbidden liturgy. This runs counter to the model of an inward trajectory from public to private life. Not even in the lavish 1575 preface did he make such a claim; he and Tallis pointedly offer their music as a testimony only to the Queen, whose approval will in turn ensure their further success.

The 1607 preface includes a particularly striking simile: "notes as a garland" (*notulas pro coronide*) to adorn the "phrases of the Christian rite." The image of a decorative garland has obvious affinities with an intricately woven musical work, and it recalls his 1605 statement on "adorn[ing] divine things with the highest art." It also recalls the imagery of Psalm 64:12: "you bless the crown [or garland] of the year of your goodness," *benedices coronae anni benignitatis tuae*, which well suits a yearly cycle of liturgical music. Byrd certainly knew his psalter and could search it for evocative texts of the sort. This verse was printed alongside a sixteenth-century allegorical emblem of the liturgical year—the twelve-segmented serpent handed down from heaven to earth, biting its tail in an eternal circle, adorned with the fruits and flowers of the various seasons.[39] The verse was also sung at Lauds during the Office of the Dead, a devotion cultivated by a large number of English Catholics.[40]

Byrd's term *coronis* is not the usual Latin word *corona* used in the verse from Psalm 64 and elsewhere in the Vulgate. The Greek *koronis* refers literally to a garland, to the decorated prow of a ship, or to the scribal flourish at the end of a literary composition—and also, by extension, to the highest ornament or summit of an endeavor. (In antiquity, this scribal flourish—coincidentally—often took the form of a little bird.) Grafted into a humanist Latin text, this term can describe the crowning touch to something: a sixteenth-century