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William Byrd: Political and Recusant Composer

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Abstract

Amidst the pendulum of political and religious upheaval that pervaded England throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth century, William Byrd stands as one of the best loved and lauded composers. Byrd succeeded in the secular and sacred realms, contributing great works to the Anglican Church, popularizing the English madrigal and producing prolific amounts of sacred music. However, in a time where one's religious beliefs were often linked with political loyalty, Byrd defied his monarch's established and enforced Protestant religion, composing politically charged music for recusant use in clandestine Catholic Church services. His themes were aligned with the Jesuit mission and his texts were often drawn from the lips of martyred Catholics at the gallows; their last words forever immortalized by Byrd for the furthering of the Jesuit cause and the Counter-Reformation. The examination of sources by prominent Byrd scholars, an analyses of Byrd's 'political' compositions and a study of the social and historical background are used to place Byrd within the appropriate context, prove his recusant and political leanings, and analyze his precarious relationship with the English monarch, Elizabeth I. It is shown that Byrd could not have proceeded with his recusant practices, personally or musically, had it not been for his status as a composer, as well as Byrd's shrewdness in procuring diplomatic relationships with high persons at court and with Queen Elizabeth I through the Chapel Royal. Finally, Byrd's success at writing for the Anglican Church service and popular secular music showcased his ability to take a moderate stance in situations that benefitted his status with the crown.

Keywords

William Byrd, Recusancy, Jesuits, Gallow texts, Motets

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Erratum

Page 22, Paragraph 1, Line 5: Sussex should read Essex

William Byrd: Political and Recusant Composer

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The sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century composer, William Byrd, was the most celebrated and lauded English composer of his time.¹ Byrd succeeded in the secular and sacred realms, contributing great works to the Anglican Church, popularizing the English madrigal and producing prolific amounts of sacred music in Latin for forbidden and clandestine use by English Catholics.² Though some of his earlier compositions display his religious preference, Byrd's politically charged compositional activism became more daring and productive during his last decade of living in London, and after his retirement from the Chapel Royal, when he settled at Ingatestone in Essex near his recusant patron Sir John Petre.³ During this last period in his life he published his *Cantiones sacraes* motet collections, his Masses for three, four and five voices, and his *Gradualia* Books I and II. Of these, the first and last collections contained motets whose subjects were politically charged.⁴ Other motets included in these collections were based on "gallows texts."⁵ These were the rather obscure texts from scripture that were taken from the last words of executed Catholic martyrs.⁶ Byrd risked persecution in the form of severe punishment, torture, and execution with his musical defiance and recusant practices.⁷ There is unanimous sentiment among William Byrd scholars that the composer could not have safely and successfully attempted to convey his religious and political passion for the Catholic cause, as he did so blatantly, had it not been for his status as a composer. Byrd scholar Joseph Kerman states in *Music and Politics: The Case of William Byrd*, "The efficacy of Byrd's politics was made possible by the quality of his music."⁸ There are two more reasons why Byrd received political amnesty despite his thinly veiled opposition to the crown's preferred religion. First, Byrd's

¹ Kerry McCarthy, "William Byrd the Catholic," *Sacred Music* 133, no. 4 (2006): 48.

² Sean Burton, "Sacred and Political Duality: An Analysis of Selected Motets from William Byrd's *Gradualia*," *Choral Journal* 47, no. 6 (2006) 7.

³ Joseph Kerman, "Music and Politics: The Case of William Byrd (1540-1623)," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 144, no. 3 (2000): pg. 282, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1515590> (accessed September 22, 2011).

⁴ Sean Burton, "Sacred and Political Duality: An Analysis of Selected Motets from William Byrd's *Gradualia*," *Choral Journal* 47, no. 6 (2006) 7.

⁵ Joseph Kerman, "William Byrd, Catholic and Careerist," *Sacred Music* 135, no.3 (2008): 16.

⁶ Joseph Kerman, "Music and Politics: The Case of William Byrd (1540-1623)," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 144, no. (2000): pg. 279, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1515590> (accessed September 22, 2011).

⁷ Joseph Kerman, "William Byrd, Catholic and Careerist," *Sacred Music* 135, no.3 (2008): 14.

⁸ Joseph Kerman, "Music and Politics: The Case of William Byrd (1540-1623)," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 144, no. 3 (2000): pg. 284, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1515590> (accessed September 22, 2011).

shrewdness allowed him to procure diplomatic relationships with high persons at court and with Queen Elizabeth through the Chapel Royal. Second, Byrd's success at writing both for the Anglican Church service and popular secular music showcased his ability to take a moderate stance in situations that benefitted his status with the crown positively.

The political climate during Byrd's era was plagued with religious inconsistency and political upheaval. In *Music and Politics* Kerman uses the analogy of a pendulum to describe the maneuverings of the monarchy.⁹ This description casts an especially appropriate picture, considering the religious turmoil that followed Henry VIII's decision to abolish ties with Rome and set himself up as the head of the English Anglican Church. The monarchy swung back and forth from Protestantism to Catholicism after each heir's ascension. After a harsh, bloody reign by the staunchly Catholic Mary I, Protestantism was reinstated by Elizabeth I. At the beginning of Elizabeth's reign she was loath to intrude upon the conscience of her subjects, keeping a rather lenient and tolerant policy on religion.¹⁰ All she demanded was loyalty to the crown. However, English Catholics that refused to publically yield their religious allegiance to Rome and attend the Anglican services were labeled recusant, from the Latin *recusare*, meaning "to refuse."¹¹

Byrd was a steadfast recusant. Born in 1540, it is probable that Byrd was at St. Paul's (Catholic) Cathedral with his brothers John and Symond, and learned to play the keyboard instruments while he was a chorister there.¹² Though the details of his early years are somewhat ambiguous, there is reason to believe that he was connected with the Chapel Royal during the end of Mary's reign in 1558.¹³ He also apprenticed under Thomas Tallis, a venerable English composer about whom scholars have recently speculated was secretly Catholic himself.¹⁴ As a teen, he collaborated with two members of the Chapel Royal, William Mundy and John Sheppard, in a setting of a psalm for four male voices. This was a liturgical piece that would have been performed for Easter week.¹⁵ This collaboration with Mundy and Sheppard was impressive because it proved the young Byrd to be

⁹ Joseph Kerman, "Music and Politics: The Case of William Byrd (1540-1623)," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 144, no. 3 (2000): pg. 276, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1515590> (accessed September 22, 2011).

¹⁰ Joseph Kerman, "Music and Politics: The Case of William Byrd (1540-1623)," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 144, no. 3 (2000): pg. 280-281, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1515590> (accessed September 22, 2011).

¹¹ Kerry McCarthy, *Liturgy and Contemplation in Byrd's Gradualia* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 6.

¹² John Harley, *The World of William Byrd: Musicians, Merchants and Magnates* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), 6-18.

¹³ Sean Burton, "Sacred and Political Duality: An Analysis of Selected Motets from William Byrd's *Gradualia*," *Choral Journal* 47, no. 6 (2006) 7.

¹⁴ John Bennett, "A Tallis Patron?" *Royal Musical Association Research Chronicle*, no. 21 (1988): 43.

¹⁵ John Harley, *The World of William Byrd: Musicians, Merchants and Magnates* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), 52.

musically gifted and able to work with more mature composers. Furthermore, by writing inspired liturgical music for the most important Catholic rite on the Church Calendar, Byrd positioned himself well with Mary I during a precarious time. These character traits would prove beneficial to him throughout his career.¹⁶

This youthful example was not only a sign of diplomatic intelligence, but also of strong conviction, as Byrd showed strong signs of his Catholic sympathies. According to Kerry McCarthy in her article, “William Byrd the Catholic,” Byrd thrived under Queen Mary’s reign, as she had a “taste for elaborate Latin Church music,” for the Catholic service.¹⁷ Though Byrd did not seem to have a problem with writing for the Anglican service, as he certainly did later at Lincoln Cathedral, his composing for Latin Church music was less a matter of preference than it was a matter of personal conviction. Byrd himself attested to this when he wrote this preface in a 1605 motet book, “With 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 fulfill my office in any other way but to adorn divine things with the highest art of which I was capable.”¹⁸ For Byrd, Catholic liturgical music was that higher art. Like sculptor Lysippus and painter Apelles, who brought perfection to the Hellenistic portrait of Alexander the Great, Byrd believed that he was gifted to bring perfection to the words of God, and the only true way to accomplish this was to write for the Catholic liturgy. However, in musical doctrine, just as in religious doctrine, there was disagreement. Under the Protestant rule in England, Catholic music was considered too cluttered. The propensity to obscure the text with ‘excessive’ polyphony and imitation was considered inappropriate for the purpose of music in church. According to the Rev. J. Powell Metcalf, the purpose of the established English church was to “bring the doctrines of the Church—that appointed instrument for the salvation of souls—to bear pointedly, intelligibly, personally, on the mean and unlearned as on the instructed scribe.”¹⁹ In other words, the depiction of meaning, rather than the ornamentation of meaning, was held supreme.

However, it was a common theological idea that how people worshiped reflected and even determined what they believed (*Lex orandi, lex credendi*). McCarthy writes that “public prayer was, as it had been for centuries in pre-reformation England, inextricably linked with music-making,” and that “in such volatile times, the outward practices of worship were often the only touchstone for inward loyalty.”²⁰ Thus the music used in worship could be viewed as an outward proof of one’s allegiance toward either the queen or the pope. According to William

¹⁶ Joseph Kerman, “William Byrd, Catholic and Careerist,” *Sacred Music* 135, no.3 (2008): 13.

¹⁷ Kerry McCarthy, “William Byrd the Catholic,” *Sacred Music* 133, no. 4 (2006): 49.

¹⁸ Kerry McCarthy, *Liturgy and Contemplation in Byrd’s Gradualia* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 11.

¹⁹ J. Powell Metcalfe, “The Music of the Church of England, As Contemplated by the Reformers,” *The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular* 12, no. 273 (1865): 157, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3354142> (accessed September 29, 2011).

²⁰ Kerry McCarthy, “William Byrd the Catholic,” *Sacred Music* 133, no. 4 (2006): 49.

Sheils in an essay on Catholicism and recusancy, Catholicism was effectively outlawed due to the increased “anti-popery of the governing classes founded on the identification of the pope as the Anti-Christ and the evidence of Catholic plots against the regime involving foreign, usually Spanish, intervention.”²¹ Under the Act of Uniformity of 1559, this act of recusancy resulted in a fine of twelve pence for every Sunday service willfully missed.²² The Act of 1563 added more severity to the legislation, imposing a larger fine on anyone who attended mass, and the priests who administered the service liable of the death penalty. The Act of 1581 imposed even larger fines on the Catholic laity and equated the activities of priests with treason. Finally, laws passed in 1585 declared that any priests in Wales or England were guilty of treason *ipso facto* and any who were found harboring them would be charged the death penalty. Sheils states that this last Act “represented the culmination of Elizabethan legislation against Catholics.”²³ It is interesting to note that though it seems that Elizabeth favored religious leniency after her elder sister’s notoriously bloody reign, the anti-recusancy laws were passed only during Elizabeth’s rule. Therefore it must follow that she believed in and passed law based on the theological idea of *lex orandi, lex credendi*.

Under Elizabeth I Byrd was appointed the choirmaster and organist for the Lincoln Cathedral in 1563, later leaving that appointment in 1572 for the prestigious position as Gentleman of the Chapel Royal, where he was served as a singer, composer, the co-organist with Tallis. Despite his employment Byrd did encounter legal problems as a result of his opposition to the monarch’s religion. In David Mateer’s essay, “William Byrd’s Middlesex Recusancy,” Mateer details the extent to which Byrd and his household experienced legal duress due to their absence from church services, an action that culminated in their summons to court and warrants for their arrest on multiple occasions.²⁴ His servant, John Reason, was imprisoned and Byrd’s name occurs on a list of known relievers of papists.²⁵ ‘Relievers of papists’ were those who housed Catholic priests, held services, or helped the Catholic cause in any monetary way. Byrd was even fined a sum of £200 for his lack of attendance.²⁶ Extraordinarily, Byrd’s ‘religious delinquency’ against the crown only came to light after he was appointed to the queen’s Chapel Royal. It seems that Byrd received great favor from Elizabeth I because of the prestige he brought to the court, and this favor protected him and his family against any serious harm. According to Kerman, Elizabeth used the Chapel as a diplomatic tool. She could impress foreign dignitaries, most of whom were Catholic, with her “high church” structure and music in Latin. It showed a

²¹ Robert Tittler and Norman Jones, eds. *A Companion to Tudor Britain (Blackwell Companions to British History)*, Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, 254.

²² David Mateer, “William Byrd’s Middlesex Recusancy,” *Music & Letters* 78, no. 1 (1997): 2.

²³ Robert Tittler and Norman Jones, eds. *A Companion to Tudor Britain (Blackwell Companions to British History)*, Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, 254-255.

²⁴ David Mateer, “William Byrd’s Middlesex Recusancy,” *Music & Letters* 78, no. 1 (1997): 1.

²⁵ Joseph Kerman, “Music and Politics: The Case of William Byrd (1540-1623),” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 144, no. 3 (2000): pg. 277, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1515590> (accessed September 22, 2011).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 276.

political open-mindedness, balance, and religious conservatism.²⁷ Elizabeth was also accomplished on the virginal, and Byrd's keyboard music was the best to be had.²⁸ Byrd furthermore flattered the queen with many of his compositions. He wrote "This Sweet and Merry Month of May," the first English madrigal in her honor, set her own anthem to music to commemorate the defeat of the Spanish Armada, and wrote the Great Service, which was the grandest piece of Anglican music ever to be written, for the occasion of her thirtieth Accession Day.²⁹ Byrd and Tallis also dedicated their *Cantiones, quae ab argumento sacrae vocantur*, of 1575 to Elizabeth, and she in turn granted them joint ownership of a royal patent for publishing music, padding their financial pockets exceedingly well.³⁰ The royal patent also gave Tallis, Byrd, and their compositions a type of protected status.³¹ Kerman writes, "whether or not Elizabeth personally cared about Byrd's music, she understood that the distinction of her chapel rested on him. In any case, if Elizabeth was persuaded that Byrd was England's pride she would have kept him in her good graces so long as, and just so long as, he stayed clear of anything treasonous."³² Apparently she thought that recusancy was clear of treason, because according to Mateer, many of Byrd's indictments were halted due to the intervention of the queen.³³

The reason for the discriminatory legislation was due to the turbulence of the queen's reign. After Pope Pius V excommunicated Elizabeth I, absolving her Catholic subjects' obedience to her as queen, the loyalty of Catholics was judged solely on the grounds of their faith.³⁴ Also, as Kerman explains, "Elizabeth's reign was racked by the armed uprising of the Northern earls, by attempted invasion from Spain, by a series of plots to depose her, and by the fomentations of the Society of Jesus."³⁵ This society was born out of the Counter-Reformation, and its members were known as the Jesuits. They were trained in colleges abroad, ordained as priests, and then sent back to England to proselytize the country back to Catholicism, the 'old religion.' For most, this mission was at the expense of

²⁷ Ibid, 281.

²⁸ Joseph Kerman, "William Byrd, Catholic and Careerist," *Sacred Music* 135, no.3 (2008): 15.

²⁹ Joseph Kerman, "Music and Politics: The Case of William Byrd (1540-1623)," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 144, no. 3 (2000): pg. 277, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1515590> (accessed September 22, 2011).

³⁰ Sean Burton, "Sacred and Political Duality: An Analysis of Selected Motets from William Byrd's *Gradualia*," *Choral Journal* 47, no. 6 (2006) 7.

³¹ Jeremy L. Smith, "'Unlawful song': Byrd, the Babington plot and the Paget choir," *Early Music* 38, no. 4 (2010): pg. 504.

³² Joseph Kerman, "Music and Politics: The Case of William Byrd (1540-1623)," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 144, no. 3 (2000): pg. 281-282, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1515590> (accessed September 22, 2011).

³³ David Mateer, "William Byrd's Middlesex Recusancy," *Music & Letters* 78, no. 1 (1997): 11.

³⁴ Robert Tittler and Norman Jones, eds. *A Companion to Tudor Britain (Blackwell Companions to British History)*, Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, 255.

³⁵ Joseph Kerman, "Music and Politics: The Case of William Byrd (1540-1623)," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 144, no. 3 (2000): pg. 276, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1515590> (accessed September 22, 2011).

their lives.³⁶ Indeed, the last decade of Byrd's involvement in the Chapel Royal, the 1580s, were exceedingly grim for the recusants. Many 'missionaries' were martyred, including the infamous execution of Jesuit priest Edmund Campion. The Throckmorton and Babington plots failed, resulting in the execution of Mary Queen of Scots, and the Spanish Armada was defeated.³⁷ Music was a way for the downcast and marginalized society to express their laments, protests, and exhortations.

William Byrd, safely protected due to his prodigious musical ability and position at the Chapel Royal, was directly tied to the leaders of the society, their sympathizers, and musically bound to their mission.³⁸ Byrd was present at Hurleyford on July 14, 1586 when the Jesuit Leaders Henry Garnett and Robert Southwell arrived in England to begin their mission. He was even commemorated in a description of the event by Father William Weston as one who "sacrificed everything for the faith."³⁹ And Southwell and Garnett's twenty-year Jesuit mission in England corresponds with Byrd's political and religious output of his *Cantiones sacrae* I and II, the Masses, and his *Gradualia*.⁴⁰ It is even speculated that Byrd was somehow connected to the Throckmorton and Babington plots because the latter's recalcitrant instigator, Thomas Paget, was one of Byrd's patrons. Both plots were a treasonous attempt to free Mary Queen of Scots from imprisonment and assassinate Elizabeth I. Whether he was involved or not, Smith states that Byrd suffered by the taint of association.⁴¹ In a letter from a fellow recusant to Paget, the writer stated that, "of Mr. Byrd you are not worthy, and we take comfort in him as a lean-to by whom we are relieved upon every casual wreck."⁴² It can be clearly seen then, that although Byrd was the jewel of Elizabeth's court and the Chapel Royal, he was also the central ornament of the Jesuit mission, and bound by his personal convictions. This caused him to lead a double life, one that he accomplished through the texts and themes of his music.⁴³

³⁶ Kerry McCarthy, *Liturgy and Contemplation in Byrd's Gradualia* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 20.

³⁷ Joseph Kerman, "Music and Politics: The Case of William Byrd (1540-1623)," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 144, no. 3 (2000): pg. 277, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1515590> (accessed September 22, 2011).

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 276.

³⁹ Craig A. Monson, "Byrd, the Catholics, and the Motet: The Hearing Reopened." In *Hearing the Motet*, ed. Dolores Pesce (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 348.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 350.

⁴¹ Jeremy L. Smith, "'Unlawful song': Byrd, the Babington plot and the Paget choir," *Early Music* 38, no. 4 (2010): pg. 497.

⁴² Joseph Kerman, "Music and Politics: The Case of William Byrd (1540-1623)," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 144, no. 3 (2000): pg. 277, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1515590> (accessed September 22, 2011).

⁴³ Joseph Kerman, "William Byrd, Catholic and Careerist," *Sacred Music* 135, no.3 (2008): 15.

He did this principally through the Latin motet, a genre that had no place in the Anglican Church service, but one that Byrd composed in prolifically.⁴⁴ Most of the motets were drawn from seemingly harmless biblical texts in Psalms, the prophetic books, and the Gospels, but he wasn't individually inspired when choosing them. In his essay "Byrd, the Catholics, and the Motet: The Hearing Reopened," a formidable source of the connection between Byrd and the Jesuits, Craig Monson explains that, "The words of Byrd's 'political' motets speak a language that turns out to have been much closer than previously realized to the rhetoric of other English Catholics, and especially of Jesuits such as Garnet and Southwell, both in their public and private communications. The existence of this common language helps explain how Byrd (or his priests or patrons) came to choose many of his texts, how others besides musicians could have known their sources, and also how such texts would have been 'heard' by Byrd and his fellow Catholics."⁴⁵

Indeed, Byrd used themes in his motets that correspond directly with Jesuit correspondence and publications, such as the Babylonian captivity, Egyptian captivity, liberation, the coming of God, and martyrdom.⁴⁶ There is an intriguing instance of this commonality that occurs between the Jesuits, Byrd, and the Holy Roman Empire. Monson explains how Southwell and Garnet would often make reference to the Catholic community as Jerusalem and to the individual as an Israelite. This is illustrated by a letter written in 1587 by Southwell that includes both Babylonian and Egyptian captivity references: "For upon the fluddes of *Babilon*, what cause have we, but layinge a side our myrth and musicke, to sitt & weepe, remembreinge our absence, out of our heavenly *Sion*: In the vassalge and servilitye of *Egipt*, where we are so dayly oppressed with uncessante afflictions, & filthy workes."⁴⁷ This text, which is taken from Psalm 137 (Monson cites this as Psalm 136, which is correct if you are using the Latin Vulgate Bible), is used again in a musical correspondence between Byrd and the imperial Kappellmeister of the Holy Roman Empire, Phillippe de Monte. De Monte sent Byrd a series of verses that begin with "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion..." Byrd in turn, rearranged the motet and sent it back to De Monte, his music capturing the words of the Jesuits and reaching the leaders of Catholicism outside of England.⁴⁸ In another instance, his motet, "Unam petii a Domino," is taken from Psalm 26. The psalm cries for the right to worship freely in the house of the Lord forever (liberation). This text also adorned the title page of Catholic literature produced by Catholic promoter Robert

⁴⁴ Joseph Kerman, "Music and Politics: The Case of William Byrd (1540-1623)," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 144, no. 3 (2000): pg. 277, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1515590> (accessed September 22, 2011).

⁴⁵ Craig A. Monson, "Byrd, the Catholics, and the Motet: The Hearing Reopened." In *Hearing the Motet*, ed. Dolores Pesce (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 350.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 348.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 353.

⁴⁸ Joseph Kerman, "Music and Politics: The Case of William Byrd (1540-1623)," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 144, no. 3 (2000): pg. 279-280, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1515590> (accessed September 22, 2011).

Parsons. Kerman notes some of the other motets that Byrd wrote about the coming of God, including “Domine praestolamur adventum tuum,” “Exsurge quare obdormis Domine,” and the reprimanding “Vigilate, nescitis enim quando Dominus veniat.”⁴⁹ The text of this latter motet (taken from Mark 13) was also directly quoted by Parson in *An epistle of the persecution of Catholicks*. Parson’s letter commands the faithful to be diligent to the end, to “Looke aboute, watch and praye, for you know not when the tyme shalbe. But as I say to you, so I saie to all, be watchfull.”⁵⁰

Diligence and solidarity were immensely significant to the Jesuit cause in light of the persecution that many recusants faced, and Byrd’s most daring motets were those that commemorated martyrs’ last words, or those that he pictorially composed to describe their gruesome executions. The first and most famous Jesuit martyr was Father Edmund Campion, who was hung, drawn, and quartered for treason with Ralph Emerson and Robert Persons, in 1581.⁵¹ Afterwards, their bodies were left out over night to be desecrated further by animals and by those in search of holy relics.⁵² This brutality outraged the Catholic community, and in his death Campion become not only a saint, but also a symbol of lament and steadfast faith. William Allen pays tribute to Campion and others in *A briefe historie of the glorious martyrdome of xii. reverend priests* by writing, “yea even their bodies...though hanging on ports, pinnacles, poles & gibbets, though torne of beasts and birdes: yet rest in peace, and are more honorable, sacred, and soveraine: then the embaumed bodies of what wordly state soever in their regal sepulchers.”⁵³ Smith also states that the only appropriate works to commemorate Campion were those that “glorified his fidelity to the Catholic faith in the face of dismemberment and death.”⁵⁴ Byrd dutifully paid homage to Campion in his English consort song, “Why do I use my paper, ink and pen,” published in 1588, and in his large, four verse motet, *Deus, venerunt gentes / Posuerunt morticinia / Effuderunt sanguinem / Facti sumus opprobrium* which is based on Psalm 79 (Again, Monson cites the Vulgate reference, Psalm 78). The poem, “Why do I use my paper, ink and pen,” that Byrd set to music was commonly known to have

⁴⁹ Ibid., 278-279. Translation of texts: “One thing have I requested from the Lord;” “Oh Lord, we look for your coming;” “Arise Oh Lord why sleepest Thou;” “Watch therefore: for ye know not when your Lord doth come”

⁵⁰ Craig A. Monson, “Byrd, the Catholics, and the Motet: The Hearing Reopened.” In *Hearing the Motet*, ed. Dolores Pesce (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 354.

⁵¹ Kerry McCarthy, *Liturgy and Contemplation in Byrd’s Gradualia* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 20.

⁵² Joseph Kerman, “Music and Politics: The Case of William Byrd (1540-1623),” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 144, no. 3 (2000): pg. 278, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1515590> (accessed September 22, 2011).

⁵³ Craig A. Monson, “Byrd, the Catholics, and the Motet: The Hearing Reopened.” In *Hearing the Motet*, ed. Dolores Pesce (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 358.

⁵⁴ Jeremy L. Smith, “Unlawful song’: Byrd, the Babington plot and the Paget choir,” *Early Music* 38, no. 4 (2010): pg. 500.

come out of Allen's *A true reporte of the death and martyrdome of M. Campion Iesuite and preiste, & M. Sherwin, & M. Bryan preistes*.⁵⁵

However, it is the motet, *Deus, venerunt gentes*, from his *Cantiones sacrae* in 1589, that does greater justice to the execution of Campion, as well as the other martyrs that followed him. The beginning verses of Psalm 79 even seem to describe the grisly details of Campion's execution: "O God, the heathen have set foot in Thy domain, Thy holy temple they have defiled, they have laid Jerusalem in ruins. The dead bodies of Thy servants they have given to be meat unto the fowls of heaven, the flesh Thy saints unto the beasts of the earth."⁵⁶ Byrd set Psalm 79:2 to music in *Posuerunt morticinia*, the verse reading, "The dead bodies of your servants have they given as meat to the birds of the sky; the flesh of your saints, to the beasts of the earth." The fourth verse, *Facti sumus opprobrium* is taken from Psalm 79:4, which reads, "We are become a reproach to our neighbors, and scorn and derision to those round about us." These exact words were given in the speech Campion gave as he approached the gallows. Though he was quoting I Corinthians 4:9, the message is identical. In Allen's *A true reporte* the scene is described:

with graue countenance, and sweete voice,
[Campion] stoutly spake as followeth. *Spectaculum facti sumus Deo, Angelus & hominibus*, Saying these are the wordes of S. Paule, Englished thus: *We are made a spectacle, or a sight unto God, unto his Angels, and unto men: verified this day in me, who am here a spectacle unto my Lord, a spectacle unto his Angles, and unto you men.*⁵⁷

Psalm 79:4 and I Cor. 4:9 became a meaningful peroration for later martyrs and Catholic literature, appearing on the title page of Robert Parson's *epistle of the persecution of Catholickes* and uttered by many on the gallows before the hangman's drop. The pope even offered indulgences to those that recited Psalm 79, *Deus venerunt gentes*, and prayed for the conversion of England.⁵⁸

Other gallows texts were used by Byrd as well, most importantly "Miserere mei Deus," "Adoramus te Christe," "In manus tuas Domine," and "Haec dies." "Miserere mei, Deus" was recited by Alexander Brian while being tortured by his executioners, and Southwell recited the Psalm at his execution in 1595. The

⁵⁵ Craig A. Monson, "Byrd, the Catholics, and the Motet: The Hearing Reopened." In *Hearing the Motet*, ed. Dolores Pesce (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 354-355.

⁵⁶ Joseph Kerman, "Music and Politics: The Case of William Byrd (1540-1623)," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 144, no. 3 (2000): pg. 278, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1515590> (accessed September 22, 2011).

⁵⁷ Craig A. Monson, "Byrd, the Catholics, and the Motet: The Hearing Reopened." In *Hearing the Motet*, ed. Dolores Pesce (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 354-362.

⁵⁸ Craig A. Monson, "Byrd, the Catholics, and the Motet: The Hearing Reopened." In *Hearing the Motet*, ed. Dolores Pesce (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 354-362.

consort song, *Adoramus te, Christe, et benedicimus tibi, quia per sanctam Crucem tuam redemisti mundum*, and *In manus tuas Domine* were both recited by Garnet at his execution in 1606. Finally, *Haec diesquam fecit Dominus laetetur in ea* were the last words of Father Roger Filcock in 1601. Whether Byrd or the martyrs first used these texts, this common language shows that there was a general knowledge or assumption that Byrd was using gallews texts.⁵⁹

Byrd's departure from the Chapel Royal in 1591 signals his retirement from the public sphere, but it was not his retirement from Catholic music.⁶⁰ Free of his courtly duties and firmly established as composer of secular and sacred music, both Protestant and Catholic, Byrd devoted himself to composing for the Catholic service. He settled at Stondon Massey in Sussex and took part in the Catholic community there under the protection of his patron, Sir John Petre.⁶¹ In 1592 and 1594 he published the *Mass for Four Voices* and *Mass for Three Voices* as Ordinary settings for the Catholic mass, and in 1605 he published the first book of his *Gradualia*, which included the Proper settings of the Catholic mass for most of the chief feasts in the calendar.⁶² The "*Gradualia* are Byrd's magnum opus" and it is Byrd's choice of Propers included that lead to his publication being labeled as politically subversive.⁶³ Byrd chose to include music for all of the major and minor feasts for the Blessed Virgin, All Saints, and Corpus Christi. Byrd's own description in his preface seems reflective of his religious views. He writes:

Noble and upright men, you who find it agreeable sometimes to sing hymns and spiritual songs to God, here are published for you the use the Offices of the whole year which 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 here 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 the hymns composed for the praise of the Virgin (emphasis mine).⁶⁴

These subjects—Marion devotion and transubstantiation—were main issues of contention between Protestants and Catholics, and All Saints was a

⁵⁹ Ibid., 362-370.

⁶⁰ Joseph Kerman, "William Byrd, Catholic and Careerist," *Sacred Music* 135, no.3 (2008): 18.

⁶¹ Craig A. Monson, "Byrd, the Catholics, and the Motet: The Hearing Reopened." In *Hearing the Motet*, ed. Dolores Pesce (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 363.

⁶² Sean Burton, "Sacred and Political Duality: An Analysis of Selected Motets from William Byrd's *Gradualia*," *Choral Journal* 47, no. 6 (2006) 7-8.

⁶³ Joseph Kerman, "William Byrd, Catholic and Careerist," *Sacred Music* 135, no.3 (2008): 19.

⁶⁴ Sean Burton, "Sacred and Political Duality: An Analysis of Selected Motets from William Byrd's *Gradualia*," *Choral Journal* 47, no. 6 (2006) 8-9.

commemoration to Catholic martyrs like Campion.⁶⁵ The “additional songs...from the fount of sacred writings” included texts already discussed, such as *Adoramus te* and *Unam petii a Domino* which were used in Catholic publication and quoted at the gallows.⁶⁶

One motet in particular, *Ave verum corpus* (“Hail, true body”), makes a strong political statement through the music itself and the text declamation. It is contained in the group of four four-voice motets for Corpus Christie, or the Body of Christ, a Catholic rite which has a subject contentious in nature. The Catholics believed in the transubstantiation of Jesus’s body. That is, they believed that when they took communion, the bread and the wine was Christ’s actual body and blood. Protestants developed a variety of views, but most felt that the Eucharist should be taken only symbolically.⁶⁷ It is Byrd’s unusual setting of the text that indicates a certain message or resolve for the Catholic community. According to Phillip Brett, “for one rare instance in the composer’s works, syntax overrules strict adherence to verse form in the setting of the first two lines, where Byrd also makes an important doctrinal point by placing declamatory stress not on ‘corpus’ but on ‘verum.’” In other words, Byrd chooses to stress the Latin word for ‘truth’ instead of the word ‘body,’ even though it would make more sense musically to stress the first word. Byrd chose to emphasize not simply the body of Christ, but to publically declare that it is the true body of Christ in the Eucharist.⁶⁸ Though written for clandestine use, Byrd’s blatant obstinacy was out for the world, and the crown, to see.

The publication did not go unnoticed. According to Burton, due to rise in anti-Catholic sentiment after the failed Gunpowder plot in November of that year, Byrd had to withdraw the book until it could be reissued with its second installment in 1610.⁶⁹ The Gunpowder plot, or the Jesuit Treason, was an attempted assassination of King James I by English Catholics. McCarthy also writes that the antipathy toward anything Catholic was so strong that a man who was in possession of “certain papistical books written by William Byrd, and dedicated to Lord Henry Howard, earl of Northampton” was arrested in a London pub and thrown into Newgate prison.⁷⁰ Byrd’s dedications of both Book I and II of the *Gradualia* are significant, as both of the recipients, the earl of Northampton and Lord Petre, were Catholics. Again Byrd showcased his finesse for diplomacy. As Byrd’s patron and protector, Lord Petre was not an unusual dedicatee, but the earl of Northampton was a clever move by Byrd to position himself well with the monarchy. After the death of Elizabeth two years earlier, her successor, King James I ascended the throne. The earl of Northampton, who was a Roman

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 9.

⁶⁷ Alister E. McGrath, ed., *The Christian Theology Reader*, 3rd ed. (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2007), xxi.

⁶⁸ Quoted in: Sean Burton, “Sacred and Political Duality: An Analysis of Selected Motets from William Byrd’s *Gradualia*,” *Choral Journal* 47, no. 6 (2006) 15.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 7.

⁷⁰ Kerry McCarthy, “William Byrd the Catholic,” *Sacred Music* 133, no. 4 (2006): 50.

Catholic and lover of music, was also one of the closest advisors to the King, making him the ideal dedicatee candidate.⁷¹

The *Gradualia* was the last major sacred publication by Byrd before his death in 1623. William Byrd had served his conscience as a supporter of the Jesuit mission as well as dutifully serving the monarchy as the country's finest composer. The contents of his *Cantiones sacrae*, his Masses, and his *Gradualia* were composed for the encouragement and edification of the persecuted and marginalized English Catholic society. For this political and religious defiance Byrd risked persecution, but his status as a composer and shrewd tactics of personal diplomacy with the monarchy and those closest to it gave him the immunity to compose as he wished. Most importantly, he did this while maintaining his status as one of England's most celebrated composers.

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⁷¹ Phillip Brett quoted in: Sean Burton, "Sacred and Political Duality: An Analysis of Selected Motets from William Byrd's *Gradualia*," *Choral Journal* 47, no. 6 (2006) 8.

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