
Court Connections, Italian Influences, Progressive Poetics: William Byrd and the Elizabethan Sonnet

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Then haue you Sonnets: some thinke that all Poemes (being short) may be called Sonets, as in deede it is a diminutiue worde deriued of Sonare, but yet I can beste allowe to call those Sonnets whiche are of fouretene lynes, euery line conteyning tenne syllables. The firste twelue do ryme in staues of foure lines by crosse meetre, and the last two ryming together do conclude the whole. There are Dyzaynes, and Syxaines, which are of ten lines, and of sixe lines, commonly vsed by the French, which some English writers do also terme by the name of Sonettes.¹

Published in 1575 by the English poet George Gascoigne, this description makes evident the fact that the general profile of English sonnet form as we know it today—fourteen decasyllabic lines in three rhyming quatrains and a final rhyming couplet—was already formulated and in practice

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¹ George Gascoigne, "Certayne Notes of Instruction Concerning the Making of Verse or Ryme in English, Written at the Request of Master Edouardo Donati," in *Elizabethan Critical Essays* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1904), ed. G. Gregory Smith, Bartleby.com, <www.bartleby.com/359/2.html> (accessed May 15, 2014) and partially quoted in John Fuller, *The Sonnet* (London: Methuen, 1972), 15. Seeing three different spellings of the term in such close proximity, it is tempting to infer that Gascoigne intended some sort of orthographical differentiation between 'sonnet' (quartorzaine), 'sonet' (any short lyric), and 'sonette' (French forms), though general usage at the time appears to follow no such differentiation.

by that time, but that the term itself had much broader associations.² Prior to 1591, when Sir Philip Sidney's epoch-making sonnet sequence *Astrophil and Stella* was first printed, most of the English poets, publishers, and public were evidently no more compelled by the strict fourteen-line form that Gascoigne describes—the 'quatorzain,' as it was often called at the time—than by that of any other lyric.³ Even well after Sidney's sequence broadly popularized the form in English, ambiguous use of the term persisted.⁴ As an example, William Byrd's 1611 song collection, *Psalmes, Songs & Sonnets* contains no settings of poems in the form Gascoigne describes, and similar examples abound.

In the history of the Italian *sonetto*, from which the English forms derive, no such ambiguity is evident: from early on, the term referred to a type of poem with a relatively stable formal identity, one that Petrarch's work raised to preeminence, abetted in the early sixteenth century by the charismatic Pietro Bembo. As the century progressed, *bembismo* spread beyond Italy's borders to courts and academies across Europe, including England, where Petrarch's mode of distant devotion and conflicted emotion, of oxymoron, dramatic contrast, simile and metaphor in the service of a sustained, perpetually unsatisfiable desire, proved perfectly suited to the ethos of the court of Elizabeth I. The queen herself embodied the absolute unobtainable

² The two standard formal variants of sonnet form in the English language are the Italian or Petrarchan sonnet and the English or Shakespearean sonnet. Throughout this article, the term 'Italian sonnet' denotes an English-language poem in that form, whereas *sonetto* and *sonetti* are used for works in the Italian language. Similarly, the term 'English sonnet' denotes that specific variant of the form, while 'English-language sonnet' refers more generally to a sonnet in English without reference to its specific form. Among English poets, the Italian form persisted, and not infrequently hybrid forms were employed, such as an Italian octave with an English sestet or vice versa.

³ Michael R. G. Spiller, *The Development of the Sonnet: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1992), 93.

⁴ In this essay, the term 'sonnet' is used in its most specific, modern sense, unless otherwise indicated. The non-specific phrase 'songs and sonnets', with various spellings, was employed widely through much of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. The juxtaposition of the two terms might be traced at least as far back as Petrarch who provided variety in his *Rime sparse* through the interspersing of poetic 'songs'. Clearly the phrase 'songs and sonnets', or some variant thereof, sold books in England—perhaps partly thanks to the long-lived popularity of *Tottel's Miscellany*—properly titled *Songes and Sonettes*—the first printed miscellany of English poems, originally published in 1557. By 1597, Thomas Morley could describe the madrigal as 'a kind of music made upon songs and sonnets such as Petrarch and many poets of our time have excelled in', implying, perhaps, that both types of poetry—songs and sonnets—though distinct, were recognized as suitable for music (keeping in mind the terminological ambiguity noted here). Thomas Morley, *A Plaine and Easie Introduction to Practicall Musicke* (1597), ed. R. Alec Harman (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1966), 294.

donna angelicata, and one imagines that the atmosphere of her court was permeated by the conflated urges of patriotism, ambition, and desire. In such an atmosphere, Petrarch's model found a hothouse of complex motivations within which to grow and finally blossom in profusion after 1591, the year *Astrophil & Stella* was first published.⁵

So it was that English poets were in the process of producing a significant body of new lyrics strongly influenced by continental models—including that most Italianate of lyric forms, the sonnet—at the same time that English composers and their public were fervently embracing the Italian madrigal and its aesthetic. Yet, in spite of the abundance of sonnet settings among the Italian madrigalists whose works were being so avidly collected, performed, and emulated in England at the end of the sixteenth century, few English composers of the time chose their song texts from the burgeoning body of Elizabethan and Jacobean sonnets.⁶ Only William Byrd—among the English composer seemingly least susceptible to continental fashion—chose the form with any regularity: in total, we know of ten true sonnets set by Byrd, eight published during his lifetime, two unpublished.⁷ No other English composer of the period appears to have published more than three sonnet settings until Martin Peerson's five, some three decades after Byrd's, by which time the sonnet as a poetic form had largely fallen out of fashion.

⁵ For a persuasive reading of the Elizabethan sonnet sequence as a manifestation of courtly ambition in the guise of Eros, see Arthur F. Marotti, "'Love is Not Love': Elizabethan Sonnet Sequences and the Social Order," *ELH* 49/2 (1982): 396-428. See also Leonard Forester, *The Icy Fire: Five Studies in European Petrarchism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 122-47.

⁶ Literary scholar Michael Spiller estimates that approximately four thousand native sonnets were produced in English between 1530 and 1650 (Spiller, *The Development of the Sonnet*, 81), yet I have been able to locate fewer than three dozen published musical settings from this period, excluding fragments since they fail to retain their formal identity as sonnets (except where a split setting adds up to a whole sonnet). While the body of English song from this period, however illustrious, is admittedly miniscule compared to the sixteenth-century Italian song repertoire, the dearth of English-language sonnet settings is curious, especially in light of the remarkable work in the form being done by English poets at the time.

⁷ This count does not include 'O that most rare brest', which is sometimes called a sonnet. I have omitted it from my count on the grounds that it has no discernable rhyme scheme and thus its status as a 'true' English sonnet is challengeable, though its formal ambiguity might point to the still-experimental nature of the sonnet in English at the time. See John Harley, *William Byrd: Gentleman of the Chapel Royal* (Aldershot, UK & Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 1999), 285, 289; and Kerry McCarthy, *Byrd* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 98.

Though much is made of Byrd's resistance to the new *musical* influences of his day, he was, in fact, involved with or in close proximity to several sources of progressive *literary* influence while preparing his 1588 and 1589 song collections. These may have had an earlier and more persuasive effect on Byrd than on other composers at the time, thanks to his privileged court position and his publishing monopoly, which placed him in a unique position to pioneer the musical setting of the sonnet in English.

The Sonnet in Renaissance Song: Italy v. England

The nature of a sonnet's content tends to be linked to its form: its brevity limits narrative and dialogue, while its stanzaic structure,⁸ along with the device of the turn, tends to encourage the progressive, developmental, or dialectical presentation of a single idea or device. The rigors of the form often breed syntactical complexity as poets manipulate language within it. These are, of course, its potential strengths as literature, though these same traits may have discouraged contemporary musical setting in England, especially in highly complex manifestations such as the sonnets of Sidney, Shakespeare, and Donne.

Italian composers, it would seem, solved the 'problem' of the sonnet by necessity. Alfred Einstein and others have suggested that the sixteenth-century Italian madrigal developed along with the tendency of lyric poetry to emancipate itself from the influences of centuries-old song forms.⁹ James Anderson Winn explains that this less lyric, more literary tendency allowed composers to exercise their ingenuity solely under the influence of the words as they lay on the page before them, without a strong a priori musical style or tradition inhering in those words, as

⁸ Italian sonnet: 4+4+3+3; English sonnet: 4+4+4+2.

⁹ Alfred Einstein, Arthur Henry Fox Strangways, George Douglas Henzell Pidcock, "Italian Madrigal Verse," *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association* 63 (1936-37): 82; and Alfred Einstein, *The Italian Madrigal* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949), 170.

would have been the case with the *frottola* and other popular Italian lyric forms of the time. Thus freed from preconceived musical implications, the word became the origin and dictator of musical application; and the music, liberated, as it were, from the formal preconceptions of *poesia per musica*, reached new levels of intimacy with the text.¹⁰

But if literary scholar Paul Oppenheimer is correct that the sonnet was “the first lyric form since the fall of the Roman Empire intended not for music or performance but for silent reading,” then its emancipation was essentially accomplished from the start: an Italian composer, choosing a sonnet, chose a poem largely free of the inherent musicality that attached to other lyric forms.¹¹ Faced with the imperatives of *bembismo*—to which, of course, Petrarch and his *sonetti* were central—Italian composers of the sixteenth century must have been left with little choice, as Don Harràn and Dean Mace have both suggested, but to find new musical techniques to accommodate the changing literary aesthetic.¹² With their asymmetry; their length that, though seemingly so brief, was often divided or truncated for musical setting; their developmental techniques; and their often complex, abstract, highly refined examinations of desire, the Petrarchan and neo-Petrarchan *sonetti* may have played an important role in the development of

¹⁰ James Anderson Winn, *Unsuspected Eloquence: A History of the Relations between Poetry and Music* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 139-40.

¹¹ Paul Oppenheimer, *The Birth of the Modern Mind: Self, Consciousness, and the Invention of the Sonnet* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 3. Oppenheimer emphasizes the fact that the thirteenth-century Sicilian poet known variously as Giacomo da Lentino, Iacopo il Notaro, Giacomo da Lentini, etc., generally believed to be the inventor of sonnet form, was neither troubadour nor minstrel, but royal notary (p. 185); and that the earliest extant musical settings of a Petrarch sonnet cannot be dated before the mid-fifteenth century (p. 178). He refutes the long-held assertion that both the term ‘sonnet’ and the form that the term now identifies have musical derivations. Regarding theories of the musical original of the sonnet and its name, see Mario Praz, “Petrarch in England,” in *The Flaming Heart: Essays on Crashaw, Machiavelli, and Other Studies of the Relations between Italian and English Literature from Chaucer to T. S. Eliot* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1958), 267-68; Ernest Hatch Wilkins, “The Invention of the Sonnet,” *Modern Philology* (1915): 463-94; and Spiller, *Development of the Sonnet*, 16.

¹² Don Harràn, “Verse Types in the Early Madrigal,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* (1969): 27; and Dean T. Mace, “Pietro Bembo and the Literary Origins of the Italian Madrigal,” *The Musical Quarterly* 55/1 (1969): 67 and *passim*. Some *sonetti* were, in fact, set to formulaic music such as the *frottola* and *villanella alla napoletana*. See Howard Mayer Brown, “Caccini at Home and Abroad,” *Early Music* (Apr. 1981): 149-57; see also note 45, below. Obviously, some textual manipulation was required to render the asymmetrical *sonetto* suitable for strophic setting. (The Shakespearean sonnet form, by the simple repetition of the final couplet, becomes more easily suited to strophic treatment than the Petrarchan.)

the new, madrigalian approach to text setting in which poetic form, meter, and even mood are largely negated in favor of variety, dramatic contrast, and detailed textual illustration through music.¹³

The fact that English poetry and music maintained, to a large extent, the older relationship of song-forms even into the seventeenth century, as Joseph Kerman, Frank Fabry, and others have shown, may have been at least partly due to the fact that certain imperatives of *bembismo* that fostered ever more subtly expressive musical adaptation to complex poetry failed to transfer meaningfully to England.¹⁴ Though Sidney has been called the English Petrarch, his work was missing two important external elements that Petrarch's vernacular poetry had obtained by the early sixteenth century: the status and force of cultural heritage, and an authoritative champion such as Bembo. After 1591, the English-language sonnet was widely popular and copiously produced but, to varying degrees, it presented English composers with complexities similar to those that the Petrarchan and neo-Petrarchan sonnet had presented to Italian composers earlier in the century. At its best, the new body of Elizabethan and Jacobean sonnets confronted composers with English lyrics of almost unprecedented subtlety and complexity; at its worst, with doggerel in a difficult form. That the sonnet in English did not yet have the cultural weight that it had in Italian, nor a Bembo to promote it, may help explain why English composers were seemingly so much less inclined than their Italian counterparts to grapple with the problems of setting it to music, or to transfer the lessons of the imported Italian sonnet settings to their own native crop.¹⁵

¹³ Joseph Kerman laid stress upon the role of multiple settings of a poem by different composers, as was so often the case with Petrarch's sonnets among the Italians, in encouraging the refinement of this new musico-poetic relationship over time. Joseph Kerman, *The Elizabethan Madrigal: A Comparative Study* (New York: American Musicological Society/Galaxy Music Corp., 1962), 4.

¹⁴ See Kerman, *Elizabethan Madrigal*, 21-29; and Frank Fabry, "The Poetry of the Secular Polyphonic Vocal Forms in England (1588-1627)," (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas, 1964), 106.

¹⁵ See Fabry, "The Poetry of the Secular Polyphonic Vocal Forms," 34, 137.

Byrd's Literary Milieu

Byrd's position as a member of Elizabeth's chapel put him in privileged proximity to courtly literary circles, such as that of Sidney and his sister, Mary Herbert, where Petrarchism, neo-Classicism, and other progressive literary trends from the European mainland were finding their way into the English lyric. Additionally, as holder of the Queen's patent for music printing excluding psalm settings, and as sole agent for the legal importation of foreign music prints into England, Byrd had privileged access both to continental music publications and to the collections of continental works fitted with English texts that he himself began to authorize for print in the late 1580s.¹⁶ He contributed his own compositions to the first two of these contrafacta collections, Nicolas Yonge's *Musica transalpina* (1588) and Thomas Watson's *The First Sett of Italian Madrigalls Englished* (1590).

In addition to an English version of Byrd's previously published Italian-language song 'La verginella'—to an original text by Ariosto, translated as 'The faire young virgin'—Yonge's volume contains several works by the highly-esteemed Bolognese composer, Alfonso Ferrabosco the Elder (1543-1588), who worked at the English court from 1562 to 1578, and who may have had significant influence upon Byrd, both musical and literary, during the period prior to the publication of his first vernacular song collection.¹⁷ Ferrabosco composed works for his English audience on some of the finest and most influential Italian lyrics to date, including works of

¹⁶ Granted in the same patent; for the exact wording, see Jeremy L. Smith, *Thomas East and Music Publishing in Renaissance England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 28.

¹⁷ Regarding the relationship between the two composers, their "virtuous contention in love," and theories of possible reciprocal influences, see David Brown, "William Byrd's 1588 Volume," *Music & Letters* (1957): 373-74; Susan Hankey, "The Compleat Gentleman's Music," *Music & Letters* (1981): 152; Harley, *William Byrd*, 280; Kerman, *Elizabethan Madrigal*, 77, 92-93; Joseph Kerman, "An Italian Musician in Elizabethan England," in *Write All These Down: Essays on Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 144, 147; Morley, *A Plaine and Easie Introduction*, 202; Henry Peacham, *The Compleat Gentleman* (London, 1622; facs, edn., Amsterdam: Da Capo Press, 1968), 101-102.

Bembo, Sannazaro, Ariosto, Torquato Tasso and, of course, Petrarch.¹⁸

Even more than Yonge or Ferrabosco, Thomas Watson seems to have connected Byrd directly with the cutting edge of English lyric poetry and poetics at the end of the 1580s. The first verifiable collaboration between the two was the broadside *A gratification unto Master John Case, for his learned book, lately made in the praise of music*, published in 1589, for which Watson wrote the text and Byrd the music. Though the details surrounding this initial collaboration are obscure, their subsequent work together seems to indicate quite a solid working relationship, perhaps even a friendship. *Italian Madrigalls Englished*, Watson's collection of Italian madrigals with his own contrafacta texts made "Not to the sense of the original dittie, but after the affection of the Noate," also boasts Byrd's most fashionably Italianate works, two settings of Watson's own poem "This Sweet and Merry Month of May."¹⁹

In a rather bizarre twist, several of these new texts by Watson are actually tributes of one form or another to Sidney and his father-in-law, Francis Walsingham. Multiple references to Sidney's character Astrophil throughout Watson's oeuvre suggest he had access to Sidney's work, or some more or less privileged knowledge of it, prior to its first publication, though Watson himself was not officially connected to the court. Watson dedicated *Italian Madrigalls Englished* to Sir Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex, brother of Penelope Rich (née Devereux), the woman generally believed to be the inspiration for Sidney's Stella. In 1590, the same year Watson published his collection, Essex married Sidney's widow, Frances Walsingham: apparently, the work's eulogy of Frances's first husband caused the poet no compunction in

¹⁸ Ferrabosco evidently also had a connection to Sidney at court: Kerman related the story that, when accused of murdering one of Sidney's servants, the composer was assisted in his defense by Sidney himself, and Sidney's uncle, the Earl of Leicester, who interceded with the Queen on his behalf. Kerman, "An Italian Musician in Elizabethan England," 141.

¹⁹ In addition to Byrd's works, the collection is mostly madrigals by Marenzio, fitted with new English poetry by Watson.

dedicating it to her second.²⁰ Watson's public admiration for Sidney, and his attempts, both literary and musical, to ingratiate himself with Sidney's extended family and circle have long been remarked by historians.²¹

In literary history, Watson is perhaps best remembered as the first poet to publish a neo-Petrarchan lyric sequence in English (*Hecatopathia*, 1582), though the poems themselves have proved of relatively small historical importance. Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella*, on the other hand, is not only the first major sequence of 'true' sonnets in English—it uses essentially the same form that would subsequently be taken up by Shakespeare, Donne, Milton, and so many others right up to modern times—it is also one of the towering achievements of Elizabethan literature. Its publication essentially ignited the frenzy of English sonneteering that produced dozens of extended sequences over the next several decades, amounting to literally thousands of sonnets, including Shakespeare's monumental contribution to the genre, first published in 1609.

Sidney is credited with having actively sought to change the nature and capacity of the English lyric along the lines of Classical and continental models, including Petrarch and the

²⁰ For a discussion of Essex's career and Elizabethan politics in relation to the development of the madrigal and lute song, see Lillian M. Ruff and D. Arnold Wilson, "The Madrigal, the Lute Song and Elizabethan Politics," *Past & Present* 44 (1969): 3-51. Essex is said to have been "widely known as 'the heir to Philip Sidney'" in matters military and political (as well as connubial) following the latter's death in 1586; see Jeremy L. Smith, "A Newly Discovered Edition of William Byrd's *Psalmes, Sonets, & Songs*: Provenance and Significance," *Notes* (2005): 294. In fact, Katherine Duncan-Jones has argued that Watson's volume was intended as a wedding present for Essex and Frances, providing rather elaborate reasoning based upon Watson's translations themselves, as well as "residual" allusions from the original Italian texts. Katherine Duncan-Jones, "'Melancholie Times': Musical Recollections of Sidney by William Byrd and Thomas Watson," in *The Well-Enchanting Skill: Music, Poetry, and Drama in the Culture of the Renaissance*, ed. John Caldwell, Edward Olleson, and Susan Wollenberg (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 171-80.

²¹ See, for example, Dana Sutton, Introduction to *The Complete Works of Thomas Watson (1556-1592)*, ed. Dana F. Sutton (Lewiston, NY, 1996), xxxi; Albert Chatterley, 'Thomas Watson: Works, Contemporary References and Reprints', *Notes and Queries*, New Series 48/3 (2001): 241-42; Albert Chatterley, 'A Calendar of the Life of Thomas Watson', in Thomas Watson, *Italian Madrigals Englished*, ed. Albert Chatterley, Musica Britannica lxxiv (London, 1999), xxviii; and Duncan-Jones, 'Melancholie Times', 172. At the time of his death in 1592, Watson was in the service of Sir William Cornwallis, a man known to have had connections to Sidney and his circle (as well as Byrd's). Henry R. Woudhuysen, *Sir Philip Sidney and the Circulation of Manuscripts 1588-1640* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 257-59.

sixteenth-century neo-Petrarchans of Italy, France, and Spain.²² This included picking up where Surrey had left off three decades earlier, returning to the assimilation of sonnet form into English that he and Wyatt had begun and that, in the interim, had progressed very little from the type of works made popular by Tottel. In *The Defence of Poesie: An Apologie for Poetrie*, Sidney's great work of literary criticism and poetics (probably written around 1579 but not published till 1595), he writes famously of music as 'that most divine striker of the senses', and heralds the poet who 'cometh to you with words set in delightful proportion, either accompanied with, or prepared for, the well enchanting skill of music'.²³ According to Sidney's lifelong friend and fellow-poet Fulke Greville 'there was not [. . .] an excellent musician [. . .] that made not himself known to this famous spirit and found him his true friend without hire'.²⁴ Sidney's appreciation of music, his interest in musical methods, and his regrets at not being more skilled a musician, are all well-documented.²⁵ Like Watson, Sydney also wrote poetry to pre-existing music.²⁶

²² See David Kalstone, 'Sir Philip Sidney: The Petrarchan Vision', in *Elizabethan Poetry: Modern Essays in Criticism*, ed. Paul J. Alpers (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), 187-209; and William T. Ringler, Commentary to Sir Philip Sidney, *The Poems of Sir Philip Sidney*, ed. William T. Ringler (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), xxxvi.

²³ Sir Philip Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry*, in *English Critical Essays (Sixteenth, Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries)*, ed. Edmund D. Jones (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 22. This frequently-quoted line, from the pen of the first great English sonneteer, might seem to belie the arguments made above as to why the English-language sonnet was so much less musically generative than its Italian-language counterpart at the time. Sidney may well have considered the sonnet, his own and those of others, perfectly suited to music; it seems likely he was familiar with musical settings of continental sonnets; nevertheless, the fact remains that, as far as we know, he did not live to hear any of his own sonnets in song. In fact, as many scholars have noted, it was during this very period that the ancient bonds between lyric poetry and music were beginning to loosen; see, for example, Louise Schleiner, *The Living Lyre in English Verse from Elizabeth through the Restoration* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1984), 4-45; John Stevens, *Music and Poetry in the Early Tudor Court* (London: Methuen & Co., 1961), 33-39; Bruce Pattison, *Music and Poetry in the English Renaissance* (London: Methuen & Co., 1948), 191-202; Edward Doughtie, *English Renaissance Song* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1986), 158-59; James E. Phillips, "Poetry and Music in the Seventeenth Century," in *Stuart and Georgian Moments: Clark Library Seminar Papers on Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century English Literature*, ed. Earl Miner (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 1-21.

²⁴ Fulke Greville, *The Prose Works of Fulke Greville*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986) as quoted in Duncan-Jones, 'Melancholie Times', 171.

²⁵ See, for example, Frank Fabry, "Sidney's Verse Adaptations to Two Sixteenth-Century Italian Art Songs," *Renaissance Quarterly* 23/3 (1970): 255; and Gavin Alexander, "The Musical Sidneys," *John Donne Journal* 25 (2006): 65-105 *passim*.

²⁶ See Frank J. Fabry, "Sidney's Poetry and Italian Song-Form," *English Literary Renaissance* 3 (1973): 232-48; Fabry, "Sidney's Verse Adaptations of Two Sixteenth-Century Italian Art Songs"; John Stevens, "Sir Philip Sidney

Just as his several references to Sidney's character, Astrophil, indicate Watson's familiarity with Sidney's sequence prior to its publication, Byrd also appears to have had early access to all or part of the work. Each of his first two published volumes of vernacular songs contains a setting from Sidney's sequence (though none of the actual sonnets): 'O you that hear this voice'²⁷ is a setting of Song VI, and 'O dear life when may it be?' a setting of Song X,²⁸ the latter said to be the earliest extant example of any part of the sequence in print, let alone in a musical setting.²⁹ In GB-Och MS 984-8, a set of manuscript partbooks belonging to Robert Dow, the text of Byrd's 'O Lord, how vain are all our frail delights' is attributed to Sidney.³⁰ Byrd composed two elegies on Sidney's death, 'Come to me grief for ever'³¹ and 'O that most rare breast'.³² John Harley also suggests that Byrd's *Walsingham* variations may have been the product of an effort to ingratiate himself with the Walsingham family.³³ Based upon all of this circumstantial evidence, scholars have long posited some personal interaction between composer and poet. Alternately, Watson, Penelope Rich,³⁴ and/or Edward Paston³⁵ have been suggested as mediators between the

and 'Versified Music': Melodies for Courtly Songs," in *The Well-Enchanting Skill*, 153-169; and S. K. Heninger, Jr., 'Sidney and Boethian Music', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900: The English Renaissance* 23/1(1983), 45.

²⁷ *Psalmes, Sonets, & Songs* 16.

²⁸ *Songs of Sundrie Natures* 3. Sidney, like Petrarch and others, provided variety in his sonnet sequence through the occasional interspersing of lyrics in other forms. Dispersed among its 108 sonnets, *Astrophil* contains eleven of these non-sonnet lyrics, specifically titled 'songs', employing various lyric forms, and numbered separately from the sonnets. It is these 'songs' that provided Byrd with his two *Astrophil* texts.

²⁹ Woudhuysen, 249; Harley, *William Byrd*, 281.

³⁰ See William Ringler, "The Text of *The Poems of Sidney* Twenty-five Years After," in *Sir Philip Sidney's Achievements*, ed. M. J. B. Allen, Dominic Baker-Smith, and Arthur F. Kinney (New York: AMS Press, 1990), 137; and David Mateer, 'Oxford, Christ Church Music MSS 984-8: An Index and Commentary', *The Royal Musical Association Research Chronicle* 20 (1986-1987): 6. For a discussion of possible connections between Sidney and Dow, see Woudhuysen, 255; and Mateer, "Oxford, Christ Church Music MSS 984-8," 1-18.

³¹ *Psalmes, Sonets, & Songs* 34.

³² *Psalmes, Sonets, & Songs* 35. Both poems have alternatively been attributed to Watson at one point or another though attribution to Edward Dyer is now most widely accepted. See Duncan-Jones, 'Melancholie Times', 176; Jeremy Smith, "Notes on the Poems," in William Byrd, *Psalmes, Sonets and Songs (1588)*, ed. Jeremy Smith, The Byrd Edition xii, ed. Philip Brett (London, 2004), xxxix; and Joseph Kerman, *Elizabethan Madrigal*, 10. Based upon manuscript evidence, Brett surmises that the music for Byrd's "In angel's weed" was originally written to a poem, now lost, entitled "Is Sidney dead?", suggesting a third Sidney elegy by Byrd. See Philip Brett, "Textual Commentary," in William Byrd, *Consort Songs*, The Byrd Edition xv, ed. Philip Brett (London, 1970), 111, 175-76.

³³ Harley, *William Byrd*, 251, note 23. Sidney's father-in-law, Francis Walsingham, led the government surveillance efforts that sought out Catholic subversives during the 1570s and 80s.

³⁴ Byrd wrote five songs that have been interpreted as making reference to Rich: "My mistress had a little dog,"

two in any number of arrangements, though the fact that they were at court at the same time, Byrd as a musician in the Chapel Royal, Sidney as a courtier and sometimes-diplomat-statesman for Elizabeth, makes the possibility of some personal connection feasible, especially in light of Sidney's musical interests and notwithstanding the difference in their social status.³⁶ Though concrete evidence is sparse to substantiate Bruce Pattison's remark that "one feels on safe ground in imagining a number of composers whom Sidney employed for different purposes and who set his lyrics, for his own satisfaction and to display their own voices,"³⁷ Byrd seems as likely a presence in such an image as any.³⁸

Byrd's Sonnet Settings

As noted above, Byrd's last volume of vernacular song, *Psalmes, Songs & Sonnets*, contains no poems in sonnet form, in spite of its title; and although his similarly titled first volume, *Psalmes, Sonets, & songs of sadnes and pietie* (1588) does contain two poems in strict sonnet form, it seems unlikely that the title was intended to advertise that fact specifically, given

"Constant Penelope," "Weeping full sore," "Penelope that longed," and "Content is rich." The last is anonymous in all sources, ascribed to Byrd by Philip Brett on stylistic grounds (Brett, "Textual Commentary," in William Byrd, *Consort Songs*, 172). Regarding "My mistress had a little dog," see Smith, "A Newly Discovered Edition," 297; and Jeremy Smith, "Music and Late Elizabethan Politics: The Identities of Oriana and Diana," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 58/3 (2005): 533-35.

Regarding "Constant Penelope," Smith suggests that Byrd "undertook this musical experiment at the behest of Sidney or one of his circle" (Introduction to *Psalmes, Sonets and Songs*, x, note 23, and xxxviii). Watson has been named as a possible source for this translation of Ovid. See Smith, "Notes on the Poems," xxxvii; Harley, *William Byrd*, 281; and Woudhuysen, *Sir Philip Sidney and the Circulation of Manuscripts*, 255.

³⁵ Sidney scholar Henry Woudhuysen and Brett both suggest Paston, Byrd's friend, patron, and fellow Catholic, as a possible source from which Byrd may have had access to Sidney's poems. Woudhuysen, *Sir Philip Sidney and the Circulation of Manuscripts*, 251-52; and Philip Brett, "Edward Paston (1550-1630): A Norfolk Gentleman and His Musical Collection," in *William Byrd and His Contemporaries: Essays and a Monograph*, ed. Joseph Kerman and Davitt Moroney (Berkeley, 2007), 36, 51. Woudhuysen also draws connections among Paston, Byrd, and Penelope Rich.

³⁶ Harley, *William Byrd*, 251, note 23. See also Jeremy L. Smith, "The Dilatory Space of *While that the Sun*: Byrd, Tessier and the English Sequence," *Early Music* 40/4 (Nov. 2012): 671-85.

³⁷ Bruce Pattison, "Sir Philip Sidney and Music," *Music & Letters* 15/1 (1934): 77.

³⁸ For more possible Byrd-Sidney connections, see Jeremy L. Smith, "William Byrd's Fall From Grace and his First Solo Publication of 1588: A Shostakovian 'Response of Just Criticism'?" *Music & Politics* 1/1 (2007), <www.music.ucsb.edu/projects/musicandpolitics/archive/2007-1/smith.pdf> (accessed May 15, 2014), and "The Dilatory Space."

the broad and non-specific use of the term at the time. Though Byrd set none of Sidney's sonnets, the sonnets he did set—except for the devotional 'O God, but God'—all display various combinations of elements characteristic of the new poetry of the Sidney circle, Watson, and the Italian madrigal translations, such as Petrarchan/neo-Petrarchan conceits, characters or images from Classical literature, pastoral and Arcadian references, and hendecasyllabic lines with paroxytonic endings. It is worth noting, too, that all eight of the published sonnet settings were composed before *Astrophil and Stella* started the sonnet craze of the 1590s (and most likely at least one of the two unpublished settings as well).

Prior to the publication of *Astrophil*, the secular Elizabethan sonnet was largely the purview of courtier-poets who scorned print publication. Woudhuysen suggests that, even after 1591, when print may have lost some of its stigma thanks at least in part to the posthumous publication of Sidney's work, manuscript was for some time still considered the most respectable medium for the circulation of works by gentlepeople and cognoscenti.³⁹ Thus, in addition to his close connections with the production of Younge's and Watson's English contrafacta, Byrd's proximity to courtly poetic circles may have allowed him to encounter the 'new' courtly sonnets more often prior to 1591, and in ways more likely to pique his musical interests, than composers not so intimately privy to the courtly milieu. Though we cannot say for sure who wrote any of the sonnets Byrd chose to set, any of them might have originated in this milieu, and Byrd's choices to set them may even have been politically motivated in some cases.⁴⁰

³⁹ This notion of the 'stigma of print' Woudhuysen attributes to J. W. Saunders. For a discussion of the issues surrounding the work of art in manuscript versus print, see Woudhuysen, *Sir Philip Sidney and the Circulation of Manuscripts*, 13-18. Gavin Alexander suggests that 'it was alright for a courtier poet's verse to appear in print as long as it was in a miscellany and unattributed.' See Alexander, "The Musical Sidneys," 76. Perhaps the same could be said of printed songbooks?

⁴⁰ In addition to the sonnets and the Sidney and Watson settings, Byrd chose poems in quantitative meters, works attributed to Raleigh and Oxford, and two stanza from Ariosto, all examples of various progressive poetic tendencies in play at the time. Several scholars have suggested that his choice of texts by Raleigh, Oxford, and Sidney, all relatively close to the Queen, and his dedications of the 1588 and 1589 collections to royal relatives and courtiers

Ambitious love hath forc'd me to aspire,
 the beauties rare which do adorn thy face:
 Thy modest life yet bridles my desire,
 Whose severe law doth promise me no grace.
 But what? may love live under any law:
 No, no? his power exceedeth man's conceit:
 Of which the gods themselves do stand in awe:
 For on his frown, a thousand torments wait.
 Proceed then in this desperate enterprise,
 With good advice, & follow love thy guide,
 That leads thee to thy wished Paradise.
 Thy climbing thoughts, this comfort take with all,
 That if it be thy foul disgrace to slide,
 Thy brave attempt shall yet excuse thy fall.

Of all Byrd's sonnet settings, 'Ambitious love' emphasizes the form of its sonnet most clearly, with lines, stanzas, and turn all clearly articulated in the music through cadences, subtle textural changes, and shifts in tonal area; and since it employs little musical elaboration or text repetition, the asymmetrical proportions between the two large sections of the sonnet are well-maintained.⁴¹ By virtue of their close relationship, through a largely homophonic texture interspersed with brief sections of imitative counterpoint built upon short rhythmic-melodic motives, all parts advance at more or less the same pace, arriving at important cadences together; even weaker internal cadences, dictated by the poem, are often simultaneous or with only brief overlap. Text declamation is equally apt in all parts, and repetition is minimal thanks to the general compactness of the setting. The opening is fully homophonic, without even a single note of the introductory material in the lower voices so common in Byrd's consort-song style, the

may have been part of his bid, as a Catholic, to maintain royal favor, which he seems to have done remarkably well. See David Mateer, Preface to William Byrd, *Songs of Sundrie Natures (1589)*, ed. David Mateer, The Byrd Edition viii, ed. Philip Brett (London, 2004), vi-ix; and Smith, Introduction to *Psalmes, Sonets, and Songs*, x. Regarding quantitative verse see Derek Attridge, *Well-Weighed Syllables: Elizabethan Verse in Classical Meters* (Cambridge, 1974); and "Areopagus," *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. Alex Preminger and T. V. F. Brogan (Princeton, 1993), 98.

⁴¹ Einstein calls Byrd's method of setting this sonnet 'a survival of the ancient [Italian] formalism' whereby sonnets were set strophically and homophonically, rather than through-composed and polyphonically. He compares it to a similar approach to the sonnet among the works of Festa, Arcadelt, and Tromboncino. Einstein, *The Italian Madrigal*, 103. See also Richard J. McGrady, "The English Solo Song from William Byrd to Henry Lawes" (D.Phil. thesis, University of Manchester, 1962), 10; and note 12 above.

effect of which is striking—one might even say ambitious and forceful (EX. 1).⁴²

In its personification of love and mention of the gods, the imagery in “Ambitions love” bears Classical traces, though metaphor and simile, Petrarchan or otherwise, are absent, and the poet suffers no typically Petrarchan or courtly hopelessness. The turn is effected both by a change of address, from the beloved to the poet himself, and by the imperative exhortation,

The image shows a musical score for five voices: SUPERIUS, MEDIUS, CONTRA, TENOR, and BASSUS. Each voice part has a staff with a treble clef (except for Bassus which has a bass clef). The lyrics are: "Am - bi - ti - ous love hath forc'd me to a - - -spire, a - spire, a - spire,". The SUPERIUS part starts with a long note on 'Am' and has a high pitch. The other parts enter at different points, with the Bassus part having the lowest pitch and a more complex rhythmic pattern.

EX. 1: ‘Ambitious love hath forc’d me to aspire,’ opening

“Proceed.” The poem is a hybrid of English and Italian sonnet forms—the octave is typically English, while the sestet, with its tercet division, is more characteristically Italian—though the work employs the greater number of rhymes typical of the former. The sentence structure, punctuation, lack of enjambment, and the sense of the text, all explicitly enforce the stanzaic units, as does Byrd’s music.

⁴² Further examples of Byrd’s particular style of textual illustration in this song include the delayed entrance of the superius with the beginning of the third line of the poem, “Thy modest life,” and its low pitch, perhaps a gesture of musical modesty (mm. 7-9); the quick, complex rhythmic flourishes in all voices at the words “this desperate enterprise,” which add a touch of agitation (mm. 30-31); and the homorhythmic movement on the words “good advice” (m. 32), which seems to lend a certain didactic weight to that phrase. All of these might better be called ‘intention painting’, and none markedly impinge upon the formal proportions of the poem; or some may be examples of what Walter Gray has called “musical metaphrase” in Byrd’s work. Walter Gray, “Some Aspects of Word Treatment in the Music of William Byrd,” *The Musical Quarterly* 55/1 (1969): 45-64 *passim*. Occasionally, Byrd employed more literal text painting, such as the brief upward figure at the word ‘aspire’ (m. 4), and a bit of musical adornment in the contratenor at the phrase, “adorn thy face” (mm. 6-7).

The other sonnet setting in Byrd's 1588 collection, "As I beheld, I saw a heardman wild," utilizes an entirely different musical approach to the sonnet than that of "Ambitious love," an approach appropriate to the singular nature of the poem, with its narrative content and single run-on sentence, both of which tend to weaken its formal and syntactical identity as a sonnet. In spite of the fact that it lacks, like "Ambitious Love," the indication of a "first singing part" in the printed collection, the relative clarity of the predominantly syllabic text setting in the superius confirms that this is the voice in which Byrd presented his definitive reading of the text; text setting in the lower parts is comparatively clumsy and repetitious, and frequently melismatic. While variation exists among the sources with regard to the final words in lines three, nine, and eleven, the rhyme scheme is essentially that of the English sonnet, dividing the poem into three quatrains and a couplet, though the poem's content seems to bear little relationship to its stanza structure.⁴³ Here is a sonnet with a clear narrative, one long sentence divided into fourteen phrases, line by line; its lack of either full sentence breaks or greater unification through enjambment results in an excessive number of conjunctions and prepositions. A change of narrative voice and address after the octave suggests an Italianate turn at line 9. A weaker turn occurs at the final couplet, and a mildly epigrammatic quality is discernable there. Though the poet is unknown, the pastoral imagery recalls Watson and his characters, Phyllis and Amyntas. The poem was reprinted with the caption, 'Out of M. Byrds set Songs', in the miscellany, *England's Helicon*, first published in 1600, a fact that suggests Byrd's setting enjoyed some degree of popularity.⁴⁴

⁴³ The poem was reprinted in *England's Helicon* with the word "despight" in line eleven given as "despair," thus aligning the rhyme with "faire" in line nine. With this substitution, the typical rhyme scheme of the English sonnet emerges. Fellowes suggested instead that line nine ought to end with the word "bright." See Smith, "Notes on the Poems," xxxvii.

⁴⁴ It is difficult to agree with Smith ("William Byrd's Fall From Grace") that this poem is part of a political statement by Byrd in his 1588 collection pertaining to English Catholics living in rural retirement, to the effect that "'wild heardmen' live better and rest easier than 'great princes'" (10). The heardman in this sonnet seems neither to

As I beheld, I saw a heardman wild,
 with his sheephook a picture fine deface,
 which he sometime his fancy to beguild,⁴⁵
 Had carv'd on bark of beech, in secret place,
 & with despite of most afflicted mind,
 through deep despair of heart, for love dismayed,
 had pull'd ev'n from the tree, the carved rinde,
 & weeping sore these woeful words he said,
 ah Philida, would god thy picture faire,
 I could as lightly blot out of my breast,
 then should I not this rage, with great despite,
 and tear the thing sometime I liked best,
 but all in vain it booteth not god wot,⁴⁶
 what printed is in heart, on tree to blot.

With its tortuous syntax, clumsy accentuation, and jarring mixture of the rustic and melodramatic, one can only imagine that this sonnet presented a challenge to Byrd. His continuous, imitative polyphony, without internal fermatas or stops of any kind until just before the final cadence, is well-suited to the characteristics of the text. The main melodic interest is maintained in the top voice throughout, which generally begins its phrases later and ends them sooner than the lower parts, in typical consort-song fashion. Byrd seems to have grasped that

be living especially well nor resting very easy.

⁴⁵ 'Beguile' in *England's Helicon*, which makes better sense of the meaning but skews the rhyme scheme a bit. John Flasket, Hugh Macdonald, and Frederick Etchells (eds.), *Englands Helicon: Reprinted from the Edition of 1600 with Additional Poems from the Edition of 1614* (London, 1925), 155.

⁴⁶ The Oxford English Dictionary defines 'to boot' as 'to make better; to cure, relieve, heal; to remedy;'; 'God wot' = 'God knows'.

EX. 2: ‘As I beheld, I saw a heardman wild,’ conclusion

stanzaic articulation was of little importance in this sonnet, and his music follows a middle ground between formalism and madrigalism, the middle ground of narrative. For the most part, poetic lines are articulated in the superius over a continuous polyphony that utilizes all four lower voices more or less consistently, all tending to move more quickly and in wider ranges than the top. The only obvious feature of the typical English sonnet other than rhyme scheme is a mildly epigrammatic quality to the final couplet, “but all in vaine it booteth no god wot/what printed is in heart, on tree to blot.” Byrd takes full advantage of this, devoting nearly a third of his setting to the last two lines. He ends the work in dramatic fashion, with a rest in all voices—the only moment of full silence in the entire piece—before the final grandiose statement, worthy of motet or anthem, of the final “on tree to blot” (EX. 2).

Weeping full sore, with face as fair as silver,
not wanting rose nor lily white to paint it,
I saw a lady walk, fast by a river,
upon whose banks Diana’s Nymphs all danced,
her beauty great, had divers gods enchanted,
among the which love was the first transformed,
who unto her his bow, and shafts had granted,
and by her sight, to adamant was turned.
Alas quoth I, what meaneth this demeanor,
so fair a dame to be so full of sorrow:
No wonder quoth a Nymph, she wanteth pleasure,
her tears and sighs, ne cease from eave to morrow:
This lady, Rich is of the gifts of beauty,
but unto her, are gifts of fortune dainty.

“Weeping full sore,” from *Songs of Sundrie Natures* (1589), is another sonnet with a clear narrative: as noted above, overt storytelling is somewhat uncharacteristic of the genre but does seem to have attracted Byrd as a composer. The hendecasyllabic lines with paroxytonic endings suggest Italianate models. In fact, the text has several traits associated with the newer

poetic fashions of the time. In the phrase “with face as fayre as silver, not wanting rose nor lilly white to paint it,” the poet has evoked a Petrarchan trope by denying it: since her beauty is like silver (recalling Petrarch’s Laurean gold), none of the common floral allusions are needed. Mention of Diana, her nymphs, and the enchanted gods provide Classical or Arcadian imagery, as does personified Love with his arrows. This last image figures prominently both in the sonnet repertoire at large and in Byrd’s choices from it, as discussed below.

The theory that “This lady, Rich” refers to Penelope Rich is strengthened by the fact that another Rich-ly allusive song, “Constant Penelope,” appears immediately following it in Byrd’s collection.⁴⁷ In fact, it is hard to hear this moving and dramatic work without the sense that Byrd had some rather profound emotional engagement with its subject, full of affection and sympathy. Though she never converted, Rich was rumored to have had active Catholic sympathies and Scottish and continental connections that may have endeared her to England’s beleaguered Catholic community at the time. It has been suggested that Watson could have penned this sonnet-tribute to her, a suggestion encouraged by the Classical and Arcadian imagery.⁴⁸ Woudhuysen asserts the possibility that Watson, like Byrd, may have had some personal association with Rich through Edward Paston.⁴⁹

“Weeping full sore” is a large-scale work clearly indebted to the consort-song, though Neighbour points out that “In Weeping full sore [. . .] one part starts like a ‘first singing part’, but later merges with the others in cell-like antiphony [. . .] which differs markedly from consort-

⁴⁷ Mateer notes that silver and rose evoke the Devereux coat of arms, as in Sonnet XIII of *Astrophil and Stella*: “Where roses gueuls are borne in silver field”; and Smith has presented a case for the popular association of the mythological Diana with Rich during this period. See Mateer, Preface to *Songs of Sundrie Natures*, xiv; Sidney, *The Poems of Sir Philip Sidney*, 171; and Smith, “Music and Late Elizabethan Politics,” 521-35.

⁴⁸ Mateer, Preface to *Songs of Sundrie Natures*, xiv.

⁴⁹ Woudhuysen, *Sir Philip Sidney and the Circulation of Manuscripts*, 251-54. The ill-fated plot of Rich’s brother, the Earl of Essex, to overthrow Elizabeth and install James VI of Scotland on the throne of England, a plot in which Rich herself was implicated and for which she nearly lost her life (Essex was executed for treason in 1601), took place several years after the publication of Byrd’s song.

song style in the relation of the obvious leading part to the rest.”⁵⁰ As with “Ambitious love,” the text declamation in “Weeping full sore” seems as apt for the lower voices as for the superius; what awkwardness there is comes from setting the second stanza to the same music as the first and, for this reason, it is an awkwardness shared among all voices. Thus, though there appears to be no overtly compelling reason to assume this song was not originally conceived for voices alone, a medium in which it works especially well, elements of Byrd’s solo-song style—the gravity, expansiveness, and continuity of the setting—are particularly well suited to the poetic subject, at the same time that hints of a more modern style—moderate changes of texture, the contrast of brief homophonic sections, use of paired voices in parallel motion, and antiphonal effects, as well as its Italianate sonnet text—lend this work a hybrid flavor. In the upper voices, a rest before nearly every iteration of the word “Rich” in the final couplet highlights the text with the subtlest of Byrdian devices (EX. 3).

The image shows a musical score for five voices: SUPERIUS, MEDIUS, CONTRA, TENOR, and BASSUS. The lyrics are: "This la - dy this la - dy Rich is of the gifts of beau - ty the gifts". The score is in a single system with five staves. The SUPERIUS part starts with a rest, then sings "This la - dy". The MEDIUS part starts with "la - dy this la - dy". The CONTRA part starts with "This la - dy". The TENOR part starts with "la - dy". The BASSUS part starts with "la - dy". The word "Rich" is repeated in each voice part, with a rest before it in the upper voices. The lyrics are: "This la - dy this la - dy Rich is of the gifts of beau - ty the gifts".

Ex. 3: ‘Weeping full sore,’ beginning of final couplet

Five of Byrd’s sonnet settings in *Songs of Sundrie Natures* are published as pairs in

⁵⁰ Oliver Neighbour, “Byrd’s Treatment of Verse in His Partsongs,” *Early Music* 31/3 (2003): 416.

which the octave is divided from the sestet so that each complete poem is represented by two musical works, a treatment of sonnets common among Italian composers throughout the sixteenth century. As TABLE 1 shows, Byrd favored a musical form for his sonnets in which the first two quatrains are set strophically. The third quatrain or first tercet (depending upon the stanzaic scheme of the poem), whether beginning a new song, as in the paired settings, or set as a single work, invariably receives new musical material that is, however, similar in style and texture to what has come before. The final couplet, when present, is typically repeated. Byrd's songs in general, especially those with elements of his consort-song style, tend to respect poetic line breaks and internal caesuras.⁵¹

Songs of Sundrie Natures also contains five songs on poems containing the image of Cupid, or Love-as-a-boy, including "From Citheron the warlike boy is fled," "I thought that loue had beene a boy," as well as three of the sonnets, all of which are bifurcated as described above: "When younglyngs first on Cupide fyxe their sight/Bvt when by prooffe," "Upon a Sommers day/Then for a bote," and "Is love a boy?/Boy pity me." Variations of the Love-as-a-boy image became nothing less (rarely more) than a hackneyed trope in English poetry, used by all strata of sonneteers and songsters, employed by both Watson and Sidney, among others.⁵² Thus, while we do not know the author of Byrd's three Love-as-a-boy sonnets, we need not look far to shed light upon his setting of five texts on this seemingly so un-Byrdian conceit. Neighbour believes all three sonnets may be the work of one person and David Mateer suggests that person may be

⁵¹ A notable exception to this among Byrd's sonnet settings is the peculiar "Crowned with flow'rs and lilies," *The Collected Works of William Byrd* 15.

⁵² Lisle John credits the French influence of Ronsard and the Pléiade for the introduction of Aphrodite's son, the Classical Greek personification of Love, into the portfolio of Elizabethan poetic imagery; Praz and Ernest Wilkins point to its frequency in the work of Serafino and his (Italian) school. John, Lisle Cecil. *The Elizabethan Sonnet Sequence: Studies in Conventional Conceits* (New York, 1964), 34; Praz, "Petrarch in England," 270; and Ernest Hatch Wilkins, *A History of Italian Literature* (Cambridge, MA, 1954), 176. To Byrd's texts, compare No. XIX of Watson's *Hekatompathia* and the first two stanzas of No. 8 from Sidney's *Old Arcadia*. Mateer, Preface to *Songs of Sundrie Natures*, xiv. Sidney, *The Poems of Sir Philip Sidney*, 20. For a comparison of the Watson and Sidney poems, see Duncan-Jones, "'Melancholie Times,'" 175.

Watson.⁵³ He writes of Watson's "modernizing influence on Byrd" and suggests that, by placing "Is love a boy?" and "Weeping full sore" at the beginnings of each of their respective sections of the 1589 collection, the composer may have been "acknowledging the part Watson played in his creative encounter with the 'New Poetry'."⁵⁴

Is love a boy? what means he then to strike,
or is he blind? why will he be a guide,
is he a man? why doth he hurt his like,
is he a God? why doth he men deride:
No one of these but one compact of all,
a willful boy, a man still dealing blows,
of purpose blind, to lead men to their thrall,
a God that rules, unruly, God he knows.
Boy pity me that am a child again,
blind be no more, my guide to make me stray,
man use thy might to force away my pain,
God do me good, and lead me to my way,
And if thou beest a power to me unknown,
power of my life, let here thy grace be shown.

In setting "Is love a boy?/Boy pittye me," Byrd made the most of the apostrophic nature of the sonnet through imitative counterpoint, which achieves a conversational, even gossipy, effect as questions and answers are bantered back and forth among voices and groupings in quick succession. The two parts of this paired setting are further united by a scale motive that appears at the opening (EX. 4(a)), is used in inversion at the end of the octave, then opens the second part, also in inversion: Byrd cleverly set the turn of the sonnet to a turn in the direction of the opening melodic gesture (EX. 4(b)). This device, and the large amount of scalar motion throughout both works, makes for an especially coherent and motivically united pair.

⁵³ Neighbour, "Byrd's treatment of verse in his partsongs," 418; and Mateer, Preface to *Songs of Sundrie Natures*, xiv-xv.

⁵⁴ Love, though not specifically depicted as a boy, is similarly armed with arrows in "Weeping full sore."

Musical score for the opening of 'Is love a boy?'. The score is written for four voices: SUPERIUS (Soprano), CONTRA (Contralto), TENOR (Tenor), and BASSUS (Bass). The lyrics are as follows:

SUPERIUS: Is love a boy? what means he then to strike,

CONTRA: Is love a boy? is love a boy, a boy, is love a boy? what means he then to strike

TENOR: Is love a boy? is love a boy, a boy, is love a boy? what means he then to strike

BASSUS: Is love a boy? is love a boy?

EX. 4(a): 'Is love a boy?' opening

Musical score for the opening of 'Boy pity me,'. The score is written for four voices: SUPERIUS (Soprano), CONTRA (Contralto), TENOR (Tenor), and BASSUS (Bass). The lyrics are as follows:

SUPERIUS: Boy pi - ty me that am a child a - gain, boy pi - ty me that am a

CONTRA: Boy pi - ty me that am a child a - gain,

TENOR: Boy pi - ty me that am a child a - gain, that am a child a - gain, blind

BASSUS: Boy pi - ty me that am a child a - gain that am a child a - gain,

EX. 4(b): 'Boy pity me,' opening

Conclusion

Certain poetic techniques characteristic of the best English-language sonnets of the period—those of Sidney, Shakespeare, Spencer, and Donne, for example—seem to have discouraged composers of the age from choosing them for musical setting. These include complex enjambment, metric irregularity, irregular line lengths, too great a degree of abstraction (i.e. lack of concrete images), and complicated or especially subtle conceits or imagery. Byrd avoided any with too-complex rhetorical devices or highly abstract content, favoring simple narrative—four of his sonnets have an identifiable narrative—description, lists, or relatively trivial conceits. It may be telling that he did not set any of Sidney’s sonnets, to which we might

reasonably assume he had some access prior to their publication: perhaps he considered them beyond the limits of even his own lyric syntax.⁵⁵

Byrd's propinquity to progressive literary developments at and around Elizabeth's court, and his involvement with the first two printed collections of Italian madrigals 'Englished,' have been cited above as potentially enlightening context for his choice to set ten sonnets to music at a time when virtually all models of the musical sonnet would have been continental ones.

Notwithstanding his apparent lack of enthusiasm for the Italian madrigal, and the widespread contention among scholars that he was averse to certain 'progressive' musical influences, Byrd's sonnet settings bespeak a certain pioneering spirit in the realm of the vernacular song at the end of the 1580s, at least in his choice of poetry.⁵⁶

Fabry has suggested that, in contrast to sixteenth-century Italy where poets and composers were drawn together around the numerous courts and academies, England, with a single, centralized court, provided much less opportunity for the majority of its poets and composers to interact.⁵⁷ If the Italian *accademie* had a correlate in Elizabethan England, perhaps it was the groups organized by the likes of Nicolas Yonge among the middle and merchant classes to engage in recreational music making. Even here, Byrd had a place, one that brought him into privileged contact with continental trends: his position as holder of the royal patent for

⁵⁵ A few of Sidney's sonnets were set to music during the period, including "Lock up, fair lids" (Thomas Vautor, 1619) and "My true love hath my heart and I have his" (John Ward, 1613), both from *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*, a version of which had been published by the Countess of Pembroke herself, Sidney's sister Mary Herbert, in 1590 (the *Arcadia* is a prose work with interspersed lyrics, including some in sonnet form). Many years ago, Willa McClung Evans noted that, some time in the early seventeenth century, Henry Lawes wrote music for an almost unrecognizable version of Shakespeare's Sonnet CXVI, "Let me not to the marriage of true mindes," of which he retained only seven lines, spread inscrutably across three sexains; "Lawes' Version of Shakespeare's Sonnet CXVI," *PMLA* 51/1 (1936), 120-122. Otherwise, there seem to be no extant settings of Shakespeare's sonnets from the period.

⁵⁶ Similarly, with regard to Byrd's music, Neighbour writes that "Byrd's music can no more be branded old-fashioned for its debt to an indigenous melodic tradition with roots in the previous century, than the plays of Marlowe and Shakespeare can for their descent from mediaeval drama." Oliver Neighbour, *The Consort and Keyboard Music of William Byrd* (Berkeley, 1978), 261.

⁵⁷ Fabry, "The Poetry of the Secular Polyphonic Vocal Form," 98.

music printing gave him not only printing rights but also the rights to all music importation. As Lydia Hamessley has pointed out, assuming Yonge, Watson, and others were obtaining their continental music prints legally, Byrd would actually have been involved at some level in supplying those prints.⁵⁸

Thus, no other composer of the time was more multifariously connected to the activities of English music-making and the progressive influences, both musical and poetic, from the court and the continent than Byrd during the 1580s. It is small wonder, then, that he should have tried his hand at setting the sonnet, itself a continental import, or that he should have been the first to publish such settings. What is perhaps surprising is the fact that so relatively few additional sonnets were set to music during a time when the influence of the Italian madrigal was strong, and when no less than thirty-five English sonnet sequences were published, not to mention all the individual sonnets included in contemporary anthologies, as well as all those that remained unpublished for one reason or another—amounting to literally thousands of poems in all—including important works of Daniel, Drayton, Drummond, Greville, and others, alongside the masterpieces of Spencer, Donne, Shakespeare, and Sidney.

⁵⁸ Lydia Hamessley, "The Tenbury & Ellesmere Partbooks: New Findings on Manuscript Compilation and Exchange, and the Reception of the Italian Madrigal in Elizabethan England," *Music & Letters* 73/2 (1992): 177-221 at 211.

APPENDIX: TABLE 1. *Byrd's Sonnet Settings*

Title	Poet	Source	Rhyme Scheme	Musical Form ⁵⁹
Ambitious love	Anon.	<i>Psalmes, Sonets, & Songs</i> 18	ABAB CDCD EFE GFG	aabb'
As I beheld I saw a heardman wilde	Anon.	<i>Psalmes, Sonets, & Songs</i> 20	ABAB CDCD EFGF HH ⁶⁰	aabcc
Crowned with flow'rs and lilies	Anon. (Paston?)	Manuscripts ⁶¹	ABAB CDCD EFEF GG	abcd
Is love a boy?/Boy pittye me	Anon. (Watson?)	<i>Songs of Sundrie Natures</i> 15-16	ABAB CDCD EFEF GG	aa/bcc
Of gold all burnisht/ Her breath is more sweet	Anon.	<i>Songs of Sundrie Natures</i> 36-37	ABBA CDDC EFE GHG	aa/bb'
O God, but God	Anon.	Manuscripts ⁶²	ABAB BABA CDCD EE	abcd
Upon a Sommers day/ Then for a bote	Anon. (Watson?)	<i>Songs of Sundrie Natures</i> 12-13	ABAB CDCD EFEF GG	ab/cd
Weeping full sore	Anon. (Watson?)	<i>Songs of Sundrie Natures</i> 26	ABAB CDCD EFEF GG (approximate rhymes)	aabcc
When younglyngs first on Cupid fyxe their sight/But when by prooffe	Anon. (Watson?)	<i>Songs of Sundrie Natures</i> 10-11	ABAB CDCD EFEF GG	ab/cd
Wounded I am/Yet of vs twaine	Anon.	<i>Songs of Sundrie Natures</i> 17-18	ABAB CDCD EFEF GG	aa/bcc

⁵⁹ Indication is per poetic stanza, either three quatrains and a couplet (English form), or two quatrains and two tercets (Italian form). Where five letters are present, the final couplet is repeated. A slash indicates the division between a paired setting. The letters used to denote musical form are not intended to correlate with the same letters used to indicate rhyme scheme.

⁶⁰ This may be the result of error in the original print: if G is rhymed with E, then the typical English rhyme-scheme emerges.

⁶¹ For a list of all known manuscripts containing this song, see *The Collected Works of William Byrd* 15, 175.

⁶² For a list of all known manuscripts containing this song, see *The Collected Works of William Byrd* 15, 169.

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