

William Byrd's Motets and Canonic Writing in England *

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Scholarship on music of the Elizabethan age has long been concerned with investigating the relationships amongst the great Elizabethan composers Thomas Tallis, William Byrd and Alfonso Ferrabosco the Elder. In particular, the influences on Byrd's compositional style have been traced not only in his earliest output but also in the mature Latin-texted works.¹ While Tallis and other English composers are generally credited with influencing Byrd's early development, much of Byrd's mature writing reveals characteristics that can be traced to Ferrabosco. For instance, Joseph Kerman has identified specific points of similarity between the motets of these two composers, while David Wulstan has demonstrated that Byrd's vocal ranges follow those of Ferrabosco rather than those generally found in English music.² In

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¹ The classic study of Byrd's sacred music remains Joseph Kerman, *The Masses and Motets of William Byrd* [hereafter *MMWB*] (London: Faber & Faber, 1981). See also Joseph Kerman, 'Byrd, Tallis, and the Art of Imitation,' *Aspects of Medieval and Renaissance Music: A Birthday Offering to Gustave Reese*, ed. Jan LaRue (New York: Norton, 1966) 519–37; reprinted in Joseph Kerman, *Write all These Down: Essays on Music* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994) 90–105. Ferrabosco's impact on English music is discussed in Joseph Kerman, 'An Italian Musician in Elizabethan England,' *Write all These Down* 139–51. Another useful source is David Wulstan, 'Byrd, Tallis and Ferrabosco,' *English Choral Practice 1400–1650*, ed. John Morehen (Cambridge: CUP, 1995) 109–42. Other details of Ferrabosco's life are in Richard Charteris, 'New Information about the Life of Alfonso Ferrabosco the Elder (1543–1588),' *Royal Musical Association Research Chronicle* 17 (1981): 97–114.

² Kerman, *MMWB*, in several places, especially 115–23; Wulstan, 'Byrd, Tallis and Ferrabosco' 120.

this article I wish to explore aspects of the Tallis-Byrd-Ferrabosco relationships in a specific subset of the motet repertoire, the canonic motets. My aim is to provide a context for Byrd's achievements in canonic writing within the traditions of English counterpoint. I will point out how Byrd's examples, although indebted to Ferrabosco in certain pre-compositional structural choices, far surpass the Italian master in many facets of contrapuntal craftsmanship and planning. My discussion will also provide a background for these works by outlining the growing interest in canonic techniques amongst sixteenth-century English composers, with particular emphasis on the contributions of Tallis, a transitional figure in the development of imitative counterpoint more generally in English music.

Terminology for Canonic Writing

A study of this sort must begin with a discussion of canonic writing. Canon embraces various musical procedures. One is strict imitation of the melodic and rhythmic material of a given part by one or more other parts, starting on the same or a different pitch, after a predetermined time interval. The imitation may last for all of a composition or for a section of it, and it may occur not only in similar motion but also in contrary motion, retrograde, augmentation, diminution or a combination.³ Another procedure is the employment of musical puzzles and enigmas in which subtle use of musical notation, often accompanied by deliberately obscure verbal instructions, call for ingenuity and depth of musical knowledge in order to understand how a piece should be performed.⁴ With very few exceptions, Elizabethan composers adhered to the first of these two meanings; therefore, the following discussion will be concerned with procedures associated with imitative canons.

Our understanding of how composers used canon depends upon knowledge of the particular structures they employed and use of appropriate terminology for these structures. Although the possible combinations of intervals of imitation, time distances and numbers of parts participating in canons may seem unlimited, in practice composers tended to employ certain types or structures in canons for three or more parts. Two-part canons, often called 'two in one' in English sources,⁵ are easily described by the interval of imitation and the time distance (for example, canon at the second above after a semibreve).⁶ Specialised procedures

³ Historical overviews of canon may be found in Imogene Horsley, *Fugue: History and Practice* (New York: Free Press, 1966) 6–37, and Peter Cahn, 'Kanon,' *Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, 2nd ed., vol. 4, ed. Ludwig Finscher (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1998) 1678–706. The use of the term 'fuga' in fifteenth and sixteenth-century sources for canonic imitation is treated in James Haar, 'Zarlino's definition of Fugue and Imitation,' *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 24 (1971): 226–54.

⁴ This involves the original meaning of the term canon as a rule or law. For recent discussions of puzzle canons see Charles Turner, 'Sub obscuritate quadam ostendens: Latin Canon in the Early Renaissance Motet,' *Early Music* 30.2 (2002): 165–87; Bonnie J. Blackburn and Leofranc Holford-Strevens, 'Juno's Four Grievances: The Taste for the Antique in Canonic Inscriptions,' in *Musikalische Quellen – Quellen zur Musikgeschichte: Festschrift für Martin Staehelin zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Jürgen Heidrich, Hans Joachim Marx and Ulrich Konrad (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003) 159–74.

⁵ For an overview of terminology for canonic writing, see Elway Bevin, *A Brief and Short Instruction of the Art of Musicke*, ed. Denis Collins (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007) 7–11. A useful guide to English terminology more generally is Graham Strahle, *An Early Music Dictionary: Musical Terms from British Sources, 1500–1740* (Cambridge: CUP, 1995).

⁶ English sources use the term 'leading part' in the same way that continental treatises use 'dux' or 'guida' for the first canonic part. There is no counterpart, however, for 'comes' or 'consequente' in English sources; in the present study I use 'following part'.

such as contrary motion, retrograde motion, augmentation or diminution may also be applied in two-part canonic writing, sometimes in combination (for example, canon at the second above after a semibreve in contrary motion and augmentation). Even though the terms 'three in one' or 'four in one' are found as headings for canons in English sources, they fall short of a fully articulated set of terms for compositions in which several canonic parts lead to different combinations of intervals of imitation (above or below) and time distances. Accordingly, I need to present an overview of canonic structures for three or more parts (see Examples 1–3). I emphasise that this overview is provided to assist my discussion of Elizabethan motets: it does not claim to be a thorough typology of canonic processes in Western art music more generally (such a project has yet to be undertaken).

A double canon, called 'four in two' in English sources, comprises two canons presented simultaneously. In Elizabethan repertoire, each canon is invariably for two parts in similar motion imitation. The resulting texture in double canons involves four parts (see Example 1). Because they are based on two two-part structures, double canons need to be distinguished from the other canonic subtypes presented in Examples 2 and 3, each of which is built upon a three- or four-part framework.⁷ In Example 1, one canon is at the fourth above and the other is at the fourth below.

Example 1. Double Canon. William Byrd, *Miserere mihi Domine*, bb. 20–4 (canonic parts only)

mi - se - re - re mi -

mi - se - re - re mi - hi,

mi - se - re - re mi - hi, Do - mi - ne,

mi - se - re - re - mi - hi, Do - mi - ne,

'Invertible canon' is a term coined by Peter Schubert to describe a three-part framework, commonly employed in Renaissance music, in which voice entries conform to one of four possible patterns: low-high-middle, high-low-middle, middle-high-low, and middle-low-high.⁸ This means that if the first following part enters at an interval below the leading part, then the second following part will enter above the first follower, and vice-versa. In these canons, one pair of voices is in imitation at the fourth or fifth and the other pair is at the octave. When equal time distances separate the voice entries, a composer may choose to derive the second

⁷ Unlike continental repertoire, there are no examples of English double canons (of which I am aware) where at least one of its constituent canons is constructed according to any of the other subtypes given in Examples 2 and 3. Furthermore, triple canons, that is, three canons presented simultaneously, are rarely found in English repertoire.

⁸ Peter Schubert, *Modal Counterpoint, Renaissance Style* (New York: OUP, 1999) 216–33. The Italian theorist Gioseffo Zarlino describes how invertible canons are derived from two-part canons, although he has no term for this kind of canon, in *Le istituzioni harmoniche*, 3rd rev. ed. (Venice: F. Senese, 1573) 314–16.

pair of voices from the first pair according to invertible counterpoint at the twelfth. However, due to its complexity this is found usually only at the opening, after which a piece continues without it. Furthermore, unequal time distances between voice entries would render invertible counterpoint even more difficult to maintain among the parts. Schubert's term is worth retaining in the present discussion because it identifies a specific ordering of voices such that if the first following part enters at an interval above, then the second following part enters at an interval below, and vice-versa. This texture, with equal or unequal entries between the voices, is widespread in Renaissance repertoire. Example 2, again by Byrd, shows a combination of voices that arises when the middle part is the leader. The time distance between the second and third voices is larger than the distance between the first two voices, thereby increasing the technical challenge of maintaining strict canonic imitation, but without application of invertible counterpoint at the twelfth. Byrd's solution meets the technical challenge of this canonic structure most especially in the subtle crafting and interplay of motives, discussed in detail below.

Example 2. Invertible Canon. William Byrd, *O lux beata Trinitas, tertia pars*, bb. 59–64 (canonic parts only)

In this study the term 'parallel canon' is used for examples where the second part enters at either the fourth or fifth and the third part at the octave. If a fourth part is present it is at an octave from the second part. Furthermore, the voice entries are all either above or below the leading voice; hence, the parallel canon can be of either ascending or descending variety (a feature that helps to distinguish it from the invertible canon). Example 3, by Ferrabosco, is a three-part descending parallel canon. The parallel canonic structure is common in Renaissance music, both English and continental, even though there is no historical term for it.

Example 3. Parallel Canon. Alfonso Ferrabosco the Elder, *O lux beata Trinitas, secunda pars*, bb. 1-7 (canonic parts only)

Compositions may include free as well as canonic parts. Free parts may share some of the melodic and rhythmic features of the canonic parts or they may comprise unrelated material. Additionally, the canonic parts may be written over a plainsong; in such cases the melodic profile of the plainsong is usually unrelated to the canonic parts. Plainsong-based canons may also include other free parts that move at the same rhythmic pace as the canonic parts.

Canonic Writing before Tallis

In order to understand better the achievements of Tallis, Byrd and their contemporaries, it is necessary to provide a brief survey of canon prior to the mid-sixteenth century (for a summary of the canons discussed, see Table 1). The history of canon in England is not continuous: it was cultivated at certain times, but at others was entirely absent from musical developments. As noted earlier, English composers mostly wrote canons based on imitative principles (the first of the two meanings of the term described above) and only rarely indulged in puzzle canons.⁹ Furthermore, the nature of the surviving evidence indicates the presence of canon mainly in sacred repertoires, even though it may also have been cultivated in now lost secular sources.

The earliest examples of canon can be traced to the medieval rondellus and rota. Voice exchange (or more properly, phrase exchange) informs the construction of the rondellus, whereby all voices begin simultaneously and swap their equal-length phrases so that there is a continuously shifting texture as the music unfolds.¹⁰ The rota is similar to the rondellus except that the voices enter successively, often before the preceding voice has finished its phrase. The late thirteenth-century rota, 'Sumer is icumen in,' the most written about canon in all of music history,¹¹ has an unusually large number of parts: four in canonic imitation at the unison and two forming the *pes*.

In the fourteenth century, composers such as Pycard and Byttering enthusiastically applied canonic technique in *Glorias* and *Credos* found in the Old Hall manuscript.¹² These involve mostly two-part imitation at the unison with one or more free parts, but this source also contains an example of a double canon by Pycard and an anonymous three-part mensuration canon. Frank Ll. Harrison suggested that pieces such as these were not found in contemporary continental sources, and he also pointed out that canon was generally absent from developments

⁹ One of the earliest collections of canonic inscriptions is in an early sixteenth-century anonymous manuscript; see Judson Dana Maynard, 'An Anonymous Scottish Treatise on Music from the Sixteenth Century, British Museum, Additional Manuscript 4911, Edition and Commentary,' PhD diss., Indiana University, 1961. Another manuscript, British Library Add. 31,922, contains six puzzle canons (one with an English and five with Latin inscriptions); see John E. Stevens, 'Rounds and Canons from an Early Tudor Songbook,' *Music and Letters* 32 (1951): 29–37. Puzzle canons are also found in John Lloyd's *antiphon Ave Regina* and *Mass O quam suavis*; see Frank Ll. Harrison, *Music in Medieval Britain* (London: Routledge, 1958; reprint Buren: Knuf, 1980) 267–8, and John Caldwell and Roger Bray, 'Lloyd, John,' *Grove Music Online*, ed. L. Macy, accessed 1 May 2006, <www.grovemusic.com>.

¹⁰ Walter Odington's *Summa de speculatione musicae* from ca. 1300 contains the only known definition of rondellus as a contrapuntal procedure. However, Walter's discussion and musical example correspond to several thirteenth- and fourteenth-century English works based on voice exchange. See Virginia Newes, 'Fuga and Related Contrapuntal Procedures in European Polyphony ca. 1350–ca. 1420,' PhD diss., Brandeis University, 1987, 26–31.

¹¹ The most authoritative recent articles on this subject are Ross W. Duffin 'The Sumer Canon: A New Revision,' *Speculum* 63.1 (1988): 1–21, and David Wulstan, 'Sumer is icumen in—A Perpetual Puzzle Canon?' *Plainsong and Medieval Music* 9.1 (2000): 1–17.

¹² Andrew Hughes and Margaret Bent, eds, *The Old Hall Manuscript*, 2 vols, *Corpus Mensurabilis Musicae* 46 (American Institute of Musicology, 1969).

Table 1. English canon before Tallis

Composer/Date	Work/Source	Remarks
Anon., 13th century	Rota, Rondellus (Rota: <i>Sumer is icumen in</i>)	Voice Exchange (4-pt unison plus 2-pt <i>pes</i>)
Pycard, Byttering, 14th century	Old Hall Manuscript: Glorias, Credos	2-pt unison plus free part (Also Pycard double canon and anon. mensuration canon)
John Dunstaple, early 15th century	Gloria	4-pt unison plus <i>ostinato</i>
John Nesbett, William Horwood late 15th/early 16th century	Eton Choirbook: Magnificats	2-pt unison plus free parts
John Lloyd (c. 1475–1523)	Antiphon <i>Ave Regina</i> ; <i>Missa O quam suavis</i>	Puzzle canons
E. Strowger (early 16th century)	<i>Miserere</i> canon	2-pt 5th above
Thomas Ashwell (c. 1478–c. 1524)	<i>Missa Ave Maria</i>	2-pt
Thomas Preston (d. c. 1563)	Hymn <i>A solis ortus cardine</i>	2-pt 4th above plus free part
Anon., early 16th century	BL Add. MS 31,922	Puzzle Canons; 12 Rounds
Anon. (16th century treatise)	BL Add. MS 4911	Puzzle Canons
Anon. c. 1560–80	BL Add. MS 60,577	Keyboard, lute pieces, 5 canons
Anon. (c. 1490–1520)	York Manuscript (Kyrie)	2-pt
John Taverner (c. 1490–1545)	<i>Missa O Michael</i>	2-pt unison plus free parts in five places; 2-pt 2nd above in Credo ('Filius Dei unigenitum')
	Plainsong Mass	2-pt unison plus free part in Gloria and Credo
	<i>Small Devotion Mass</i>	2-pt 7th above plus free part in Sanctus ('in nomine Domine')
	<i>Sospitati daedit aegros</i> (St Nicholas Prose)	2-pt 12th above plus free parts in verse 4 ('Baptizatur auri viso')
Christopher Tye (c. 1505–c.1572)	<i>Domine Deus caelestis</i>	2-pt octave below plus free parts
William Mundy (c. 1529–1591)	6-pt antiphons: <i>Maria virgo sanctissima</i> , <i>Vox patris caelestis</i>	2-pt octave above plus free part
	Psalm setting: <i>Eruclavit cor meum</i> <i>Tres in una</i> (Mulliner Book)	2-pt octave above plus free part 3-pt invertible canon

in English polyphonic music during the course of the fifteenth century.¹³ Exceptions to this can be found, a notable case being a canonic Gloria by Dunstaple whose solution, proposed by Margaret Bent, involves a four-part unison canon with an ostinato bass.¹⁴

Rounds appear in two sixteenth-century manuscript sources. British Library Add. MS 31,922, from the early years of Henry VIII's reign, includes twelve rounds.¹⁵ The contents of another manuscript, British Library Add. MS 60,577, copied some time between 1560 and 1580, are chiefly Middle English verse but with some keyboard music, lute pieces and five short canons, two of which appear in later sources including Ravenscroft's *Pammelia* (1609).¹⁶ Closely related to the rota and rondellus, rounds may be defined as works comprising as many equal-length phrases as there are voices in the composition, with successive voice entries separated at time distances corresponding to the length of each constituent phrase. The material may be repeated by all voices, in the manner of a circle canon, until the performers decide to end the piece. When all voices have entered, the round resembles the rondellus by having a succession of phrases in different combinations among the parts. Rounds are expressed notationally in many sources by placing the phrases together—a vertical arrangement that serves as a shorthand for the required imitation at the unison in performance.¹⁷

Examples of canonic imitation appear infrequently elsewhere in repertoire of the early and mid-sixteenth century. Short sections of two-part canonic imitation usually accompanied by one or two non-canonic parts occur in Magnificat settings by John Nesbett and William Horwood in the Eton Choirbook,¹⁸ and in mass movements or motets by John Taverner, Christopher Tye and William Mundy. Taverner included canonic settings in his *Missa O Michael*, Plainsong Mass, Small Devotion Mass and the St Nicholas Prose *Sospitati dedit aegros*.¹⁹ Unison canons with one or two non-canonic parts occur in five places in the *Missa O Michael*²⁰ and in the Gloria and Credo of the Plainsong Mass.²¹ Example 4, taken from the Benedictus of the *Missa O Michael*,

¹³ Harrison, *Music in Medieval Britain* 236–40, and also, Harrison, 'English Church Music in the Fourteenth Century,' *New Oxford History of Music* 3: Ars Nova and the Renaissance, ed. Dom Anselm Hughes and David Wulstan (London: OUP, 1960) 103–4.

¹⁴ Margaret Bent, 'A New Canonic Gloria and the Changing Profile of Dunstaple,' *Plainsong and Medieval Music* 5.1 (1996): 45–67.

¹⁵ Stevens, 'Rounds and Canons.' The pieces are included in *Musica Britannica* (hereafter *MB*) 18: Music at the Court of Henry VIII, ed. John E. Stevens (London: Stainer & Bell, 1962).

¹⁶ Judith Blezzard, 'A New Source of Tudor Secular Music,' *Musical Times* 122 (1981): 532–5.

¹⁷ For an example see Thomas Morley, *A Plaine and Easie Introduction to Practicall Musicke* (London: Peter Short, 1597) 177.

¹⁸ Hugh Benham, *Latin Church Music, 1460–1575* (London: Barrie & Jenkin, 1977) 67. See also *MB* 12: The Eton Choirbook III, ed. Frank Ll. Harrison (London: Stainer & Bell, 1961) 64, 71. Benham, *Latin Church Music* 112, 159, claims that an anonymous Kyrie in the York Manuscript (ca. 1490–1520) and the 'qui sedes' from Thomas Ashwell's *Missa Ave Maria* offer further instances of two-part canonic writing. A modern edition of Ashwell's mass can be found in *Early English Church Music* (hereafter *EECM*) 1: Early Tudor Masses I, ed. John D. Bergsagel (London: Stainer & Bell, 1963). Another miscellaneous canon is E. Strowger's canon at the fifth above over the plainsong *Miserere*—the only known composition by that composer; see *EECM* 6: Early Tudor Organ Music I: Music for the Office, ed. John Caldwell (London: Stainer & Bell, 1965) 43.

¹⁹ Benham, *Taverner* 161, 179–80, 200, 224.

²⁰ *EECM* 20: John Taverner I: Six-Part Masses, ed. Hugh Benham (London: Stainer & Bell, 1978) 185–6, 197–8, 223–4, 227–8, 239–41.

²¹ At 'cum Sanctu Spiritu Amen' and 'et iterum ... non erit finis' respectively. See *EECM* 35: John Taverner IV: Four- and Five-Part Masses, ed. Hugh Benham (London: Stainer & Bell, 1989) 8, 16–17. The second of these canons is inexact, that is, the time distance remains the same but some notes in the leading part are replaced by rests in the following part.

is typical of the short passages of two-part unison canonic imitation accompanied by a non-canonic part that are found occasionally in early sixteenth-century English sacred music.

Example 4. Taverner, Benedictus from Mass *O Michael*, bb. 99–102.

The image shows a musical score for three staves in 4/4 time. The top staff is a treble clef with lyrics 'Be - ne - di'. The middle staff is a treble clef with lyrics 'Be - ne - di'. The bottom staff is a bass clef with lyrics 'Be - - - ne - - -'. The music features a two-part unison canon with a non-canonic bass part.

Christopher Tye and William Mundy also employ short two-part canonic passages with non-canonic third parts. The *secunda pars* of Tye's *Domine Deus caelestis* involves a canon at the octave below after a breve.²² Mundy's six-part antiphons *Maria virgo sanctissima* and *Vox patris caelestis* and the psalm setting *Eruclavit cor meum* contain short three-part sections in which there are brief sections of no more than ten bars (in the modern editions) in canon at the octave above after a semibreve with an accompanying non-canonic part.²³

Taverner and Mundy also employed canonic imitation at intervals other than the unison or octave. A canon at the second above is found at 'Filius Dei unigenitum' in the Credo of Taverner's *Missa O Michael*, while canonic imitation at the seventh above occurs at the 'in nomine Domine' of the Sanctus in his *Small Devotion Mass*.²⁴ The second half of the first Osanna of this mass has a further contrapuntal ingenuity in being built on seven progressively higher statements of a short six-note figure in the contratenor.²⁵ Taverner's *Sospitati dedit aegros* is unusual inasmuch as the tenor plainsong is itself imitated in canon by the treble at the twelfth above (with some small changes) in verse four, 'Baptizatur auri viso'.²⁶ An example of a three-part invertible canon with a free bass part by Mundy occurs as the last piece in the Mulliner Book.²⁷ Labelled 'Tres partes in una,' it is the only work of which I am aware prior to the motets of Ferrabosco and Byrd that employs this canonic structure. Non-unison canons are rarely found in works by other composers at this time; an isolated instance is a canon at the fourth above in verse two of Thomas Preston's hymn *A solis ortus cardine*.²⁸

²² Christopher Tye, *Latin Church Music*, ed. John Satterfield, Recent Researches in the Music of the Renaissance 14 (Madison: A-R Editions, 1972) 15–18.

²³ *EECM 2*: William Mundy, *Latin Antiphons and Psalms*, ed. Frank Ll. Harrison (London: Stainer & Bell, 1963) 3, 36, 135.

²⁴ *EECM 36*: John Taverner V: *Five-Part Masses*, ed. Hugh Benham (London: Stainer & Bell, 1990) 109–10.

²⁵ *EECM 36* 106–7.

²⁶ *EECM 30*: John Taverner III, *Ritual Music and Secular Songs*, ed. Hugh Benham (London: Stainer & Bell, 1984) 81–2, bars 57–68. A similar passage, but involving much looser imitation, occurs in bars 14–29.

²⁷ *MB 1*: The Mulliner Book, ed. Denis Stevens (London: Stainer & Bell, 1951) 88.

²⁸ *EECM 6*, 44–7. This piece is discussed in Keith Elcombe, 'Keyboard Music,' *Music in Britain: The Sixteenth Century*, ed. Roger Bray, *Blackwell History of Music in Britain*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995) 221.

In summary, English canon prior to Tallis is characterised by voice exchange and imitation at perfect consonant intervals for two, three or occasionally four parts. The structures outlined in Examples 1–3 above are generally absent, apart from the notable example of an invertible canon by Mundy. Another feature of early repertoire that may be seen in later periods is the occasional placement of canonic sections within larger works.

Canon in the Elizabethan Age: Preliminary Remarks

Increased interest in canon during the second half of the sixteenth century probably arose from a combination of several factors. Perhaps the most important was that by mid-century, English composers had absorbed the principles of imitative counterpoint and could apply its structural potential in large-scale compositions on a par with continental practice.²⁹ This led to the employment of the canonic structures outlined in Examples 1–3, which had already been exercising the minds of continental composers for several decades.³⁰ Other aspects of English musical culture that probably fostered the cultivation of canonic writing include the prominence of compositions based on plainsongs such as *In nomine* or *Miserere* and the greater emphasis on plainsong-based contrapuntal exercises in late sixteenth-century music education.³¹

Increased application of imitation as a unifying procedure is evident in works by composers such as Tallis and Mundy, and in motets by Alfonso Ferrabosco the Elder, who resided in England for much of the period 1562–1577.³² The style of writing in motets such as Ferrabosco's *O lux beata Trinitas* and Tallis's first setting of *Salvator mundi* corresponds to Joseph Kerman's description of how imitative textures were handled by the generation of English composers prior to Byrd, i.e., a regularly balanced and repeating presentation of imitatively treated motives without the sense of contrapuntal development of points of imitation that Byrd brought to his compositions.³³ By the time of the Tallis-Byrd *Cantiones sacrae* (1575) the structural application of imitative techniques, including canon, was well established in large-scale Latin-texted works. Although canon occurs occasionally in music for the early Reformed church and in instrumental repertoire, the most rigorous and ambitious application of multi-voice canonic textures occurs in canonic motets by Tallis, Byrd and Ferrabosco the Elder (see Table 2). The following discussion will identify the specific canon types and how they were used by these composers, with particular consideration of the influences and techniques informing the motets by Byrd, the greatest exponent of canon in Elizabethan repertoire.

Tallis and Canon

Tallis wrote a number of canons throughout his career, although their dating is difficult to determine. In common with earlier generations of English composers, he favoured canonic imitation at the unison or octave with accompanying free parts. This may be seen, for instance, in two of Tallis's three canonic motets listed in Table 2, and also in the *Agnus Dei* from the seven-

²⁹ See Kerman, 'Byrd, Tallis, and the Art of Imitation,' *Write all These Down* 90–105.

³⁰ See Peter Urquhart, 'Calculated to Please the Ear: Ockeghem's Canonic Legacy,' *Tijdschrift van de Koninklijke Vereniging voor Nederlandse Muziekgeschiedenis* 47.1–2 (1997): 72–98.

³¹ Jane Flynn, 'The Education of Choristers in England during the Sixteenth Century,' *English Choral Practice*, ed. Morehen, 180–99.

³² See note 1 above for references to Ferrabosco's contributions to sixteenth-century English musical life.

³³ Kerman, 'Byrd, Tallis, and the Art of Imitation' 90–1.

Table 2. Canonic motets by Tallis, Ferrabosco the Elder and Byrd

Composer	Work	Canon
Tallis	<i>Miserere nostri</i>	Double (2-pt unison; 4-pt augmentation and inversion) plus 1 free part
	<i>Solemnis urgebat dies</i>	2-pt octave below plus 2 free parts
	<i>Salvator mundi</i> (2)	2-pt octave below plus 3 free parts
Ferrabosco	<i>Cantabo Domino</i>	3-pt invertible plus 3 free parts
	<i>O lux beata Trinitas</i> (second part)	3-pt parallel (descending) plus 3 free parts
Byrd	<i>Similes illis fiant</i> . Verse 2	2-pt unison plus 1 free parts
	<i>Alleluia. Confitemini Domino</i> Verse 1	2-pt at octave below plus 1 free part
	Verse 3	2-pt at 4th above plus 1 free part
	Verse 4	3-pt parallel (descending)
	<i>Miserere mihi Domine</i> (second part)	Double (2-pt 4th above; 2-pt 4th below) plus 2 free parts
	<i>Diliges Dominum</i>	8-pt retrograde
	<i>O salutaris hostia</i>	3-pt invertible plus 3 free parts
	<i>O lux beata Trinitas</i>	3-pt invertible plus 3 free parts
<i>Quomodo cantabimus</i> (first part)	3-pt octave above similar and contrary motion, plus five free parts	

part *Missa Puer natus est* (unison for two parts),³⁴ in ‘The eighth tune for Archbishop Parker’s psalter,’ the so-called ‘Tallis canon’ (octave above with two non-canonic parts),³⁵ and apparently at the octave below in the Service for which only a single part is extant.³⁶ The keyboard setting of the plainsong *Telluris ingens conditor*, once attributed to John Bull,³⁷ comprises seven verses of which five are canons at various intervals: eleventh above (verses 3 and 4), fourth below (verse 5), fifteenth above (verse 6), and octave below (verse 7).

What distinguishes Tallis’s canons from those of his predecessors is their greater length and grander scale. This is particularly the case in the canonic motets (see Table 2) where the

³⁴ Thomas Tallis, *Mass Puer natus est nobis*, ed. Sally Dunkley and David Wulstan (Oxford Imprint, 1980). This work is discussed in detail in Joseph Kerman, ‘The *Missa Puer natus est* by Thomas Tallis,’ *Sundry Sorts of Music Books: Essays on the British Library Collections, Presented to O. W. Neighbour on His 70th Birthday*, ed. Chris Banks, Arthur Searle and Malcolm Turner (London: British Library, 1993) 40–53; reprinted with revisions in Kerman, *Write all These Down*, 125–38. See pp. 133–6 for a discussion of the canonic *Agnus Dei*.

³⁵ *EECM* 13: Thomas Tallis, *English Sacred Music II: Service Music*, ed. Leonard Ellinwood and Paul Doe (London: Stainer & Bell, 1974) 175–6.

³⁶ *EECM* 13 178–88. This work has been reconstructed by Andrew Johnstone as a canon at the octave below with three free parts in ‘Tallis’s Service “of Five Parts Two in One” Re-evaluated,’ *Canons and Canonic Techniques, 14th–16th Centuries: Theory, Practice and Reception History*, ed. Katelijne Schiltz and Bonnie J. Blackburn (Leuven & Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2007) 381–406.

³⁷ *MB* 14: John Bull, *Keyboard Music I*, 2nd rev. ed., ed. John Steele, Francis Cameron and Thurston Dart (London: Stainer & Bell, 1967) 134–7. This volume has also another canon thought to be by Tallis: a two-part canon at the fifth below with a free running bass part (pp. 138–41).

imitation is maintained throughout the works or for substantial portions of them. The first section of *Solemnis urgebat dies* is a canon at the octave below after one and a half semibreves between the superius and contratenor.³⁸ The setting of each phrase of text in the canonic voices is clearly defined by rests while the three free parts provide continuity and flow through overlapping phrases and occasional imitation of the canonic motives. These features, in particular the articulation of canonically-set phrases by means of rests, are also present in the canonic writing of Byrd and Ferrabosco.

As noted above, Kerman singled out the first (non-canonic) setting of *Salvator mundi* as being especially representative of imitative technique among mid-century English composers. However, the canonic second version of this motet departs from Kerman's thesis in its angular, contrasting and even contradictory motives.³⁹ It is set for five parts of which two, the superius and tenor, form a canon at the octave below after a breve. None of the points of imitation is shared among all voices; instead, an imitative point presented by the canonic voices may also be heard in some of the non-canonic voices while others have unrelated material. This is evident at the outset where the ascending motive for 'Salvator mundi' in the canonic superius and tenor is accompanied by unrelated ideas in the other parts, notwithstanding some similarities in the discantus and bassus. The following text, 'qui per crucem et sanguinem redemisti nos' (see Example 5),⁴⁰ is set by short, bland descending stepwise phrases in the canonic parts filling in fourths and fifths. The contratenor has a contrasting skipping idea, the bass has a descending and ascending semitone followed by skips to a dull bar of semibreves, and the discantus has an angular melody including the progression of a step followed by a sixth in the same direction. In short, the free parts share none of the characteristics of the canonic motive but instead contribute to a texture that explores contrasts in melodic contour, rhythm and syncopation. Following phrases of text are set in a similarly disjointed manner; however, as the piece proceeds Tallis allows greater similarity between the parts in terms of rhythm and general melodic contour, although nowhere is there the uniformly balanced and serene presentation of points of imitation that Kerman traced in his essay on the generation prior to Byrd.⁴¹

Tallis's seven-part *Miserere nostri* has a two-part unison canon in the upper parts, a free tenor part, and a four-part augmentation canon in the remaining parts (of which two are by inversion). This composition stands out as a virtuoso exercise and is the only published work of the sixteenth or seventeenth century that pursues canon by augmentation to this extent. Described as a 'canonic monster' by Kerman,⁴² *Miserere nostri* reflects a personal response to a creative and technical challenge rather than the absorption of canonic developments that took place on the continent—a process that was only realised in Byrd's motets.

³⁸ *Tudor Church Music* 6: Thomas Tallis c. 1505–1585, ed. E.H. Fellowes, et al. (London: OUP, 1928) 285–8.

³⁹ See *Tudor Church Music* 6, 216–21.

⁴⁰ In this and following examples asterisks indicate the canonic parts.

⁴¹ Complicating the situation further is a contrafacta of this piece, 'When Jesus went into Simon the Pharisee's House,' and the existence of an incomplete second version of *Salvator mundi* (2) comprising the two canonic voices and bass, largely unaltered, and one of the contratenor parts partially recomposed. See John Milsom, 'Tallis's First and Second Thoughts,' *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 113.2 (1988): 203–22.

⁴² Kerman, *MMWB* 78. However, that this canon was held in high esteem by at least some English composers is attested by Bull's copy of it at the end of his manuscript collection of over one hundred plainsong canons. The manuscript is housed in the Österreichisches Nationalbibliothek in Vienna, shelf mark 17.771.

Example 5. Tallis, *Salvator mundi* (2), bb. 4–7

per cru - cem et san - gui - nem red - e - mi -
 nos, qui per cru - cem et san - gui -
 nos, qui per cru - cem et san - gui - nem, et san - gui -
 nos, qui per cru - cem et san - gui - nem red -
 nos, qui per cru - cem et san - gui - nem red -

- sti nos, red - e - mi - sti nos,
 nem red - e - mi - sti nos,
 nem red - e - mi - sti nos,
 - e - mi - sti nos, red - e - mi - sti nos,
 e - mi - sti nos, red - e - mi - sti nos,

In summary, Tallis's canonic writing possesses a transitional character due to his choice of two-part imitation at the octave with accompanying non-canonic parts, recalling examples by earlier generations of composers. However, the larger scale of Tallis's works approaches the mature Latin-texted settings of Ferrabosco and Byrd. Apart from *Miserere nostri*, a double canon, the canonic structures of Examples 1–3 are notably absent from Tallis's output.

Byrd's Canonic Motets

Byrd's early canonic works appear to have arisen as student exercises, while his later works were probably stimulated by the motets of Tallis, the elder Ferrabosco and, in one case, by Philippe de Monte. The early motets have drawn criticism from Joseph Kerman for their wooden motives and rhythms, casual treatment of dissonance and an over-abundance of cadences.⁴³ Particularly troublesome are *Similes illis fiant* and *Alleluia. Confitemini Domino*, two works of

⁴³ Kerman, *MMWB* 59.

doubtful authenticity that contain short sections of canonic writing (see Table 2).⁴⁴ The unison canon in verse 2 of *Similes illis fiant* has several ill-concealed parallel fifths and static melodic lines, and the canonic imitation is broken towards the end of the piece. *Alleluia. Confitemini Domino* also resembles a pedagogical exercise; it is at its most ambitious in the three-part invertible canon in verse 4. A canonic consort piece that probably originated in Byrd's student days is the canon at the seventh in verse 2 of *Sermone blando*.⁴⁵

Byrd's mature canonic writing is found in a group of five motets from the 1570s and '80s (see Table 2). *Diliges Dominum* belongs with *Miserere mihi Domine* and *O lux beata Trinitas* to the *Cantiones sacrae* that Byrd co-published with Tallis in 1575.⁴⁶ *O salutaris hostia*,⁴⁷ preserved in manuscript, forms a companion in terms of canonic technique to *O lux beata Trinitas*. *Quomodo cantabimus*⁴⁸ dates from 1584 and is Byrd's response to Philippe de Monte's non-canonic motet *Super flumina Babylonis*.⁴⁹ Apart from the double canon in Byrd's *Miserere mihi Domine* there is no structural counterpart in Tallis's canonic output, although in this instance Byrd's work is technically much simpler than Tallis's virtuosic exercise on a similar text in *Miserere nostri*.⁵⁰ There is a closer correspondence between the canonic structures of Byrd and Ferrabosco, suggesting a mutual influence in the composition of these works.

Thomas Morley alludes to Byrd's eight-part retrograde canon, *Diliges Dominum*,⁵¹ in his discussion of miscellaneous canons in part three of his treatise.⁵² This piece was also very probably in Christopher Simpson's mind when he provided guidelines for the construction of four, six and eight-part retrograde canons.⁵³ Both theorists give the same rules for writing a retrograde canon, or 'canon recte & retro' as they call it, and these are applied admirably in Byrd's motet. A retrograde canon comprises an initial two-part segment that is expanded by placing the retrograde version of each part as a continuation of the other part. This process can be expanded to four, six or eight-part pieces that comprise pairs of voices treated in this fashion. Dotted notes and discords including suspensions are prohibited by the theorists and avoided by Byrd, but the end result has been criticised by Kerman as consonant eight-part writing of little artistic merit.⁵⁴ Admittedly the music moves rather ponderously in minims, semibreves and breves, but Byrd tries to break the chordal texture through points of imitation starting in bars 5, 10 and 16. However, these cannot work in reverse when the retrograde motion starts in bar 22, leading to a more staid texture in the second half.

⁴⁴ *The Byrd Edition* (hereafter *BE*) 8: Latin Motets 1, ed. Warwick Edwards (London: Stainer & Bell, 1984) 1–8. A computer-assisted study by John Morehen has provided ample grounds for removing *Similes illis fiant* from Byrd's oeuvre; see John Morehen, 'Byrd's Manuscript Motets: A New Perspective,' *Byrd Studies*, eds Alan Brown and Richard Turbet (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 51–62.

⁴⁵ See *BE* 17: Consort Music, ed. Kenneth Elliott (London: Stainer & Bell, 1971) 109.

⁴⁶ All three are in *BE* 1: *Cantiones sacrae* (1575), ed. Craig Monson (London: Stainer & Bell, 1977).

⁴⁷ *BE* 8 44–9.

⁴⁸ *BE* 9: Latin Motets II, ed. Warwick Edwards (London: Stainer & Bell, 2000) 94–123.

⁴⁹ See Kerman, *MMWB* 44, for the background and texts.

⁵⁰ It is possible that in this motet Byrd is in part paying homage to Tallis's motet on the same text.

⁵¹ *BE* 1 151–60.

⁵² Morley, *A Plaine and Easie Introduction to Practicall Musicke* (London: Peter Short, 1597) 176.

⁵³ Simpson, *Compendium* 166–9.

⁵⁴ *MMWB* 117.

The six-part *Miserere mihi Domine* has been described by Kerman as a small-scale variation work in which the plainsong appears twice, in the bass in the first non-canonic part and in ornamented form in the second half where it is in canon at the fourth above after a breve in the two upper parts. This is one of the two canons comprising the double canon in the second half of the motet; the two lowest voices form a canon at the fourth below after a semibreve on independent material. Byrd's motet is technically very accomplished with careful control over the disposition of the voices in which the lower two canonic voices move together in short phrases separated by rests. The upper two canonic voices are not so tightly bound together as a result of the longer time distance between them; consequently, a long note or rest often occurs in one voice while the other voice is active. The two free middle voices are largely unrelated to the material in the canonic voices or to each other. Byrd builds the momentum in the last bars by reducing the rests and increasingly ornamenting the plainsong with small note values, leading to a full and sonorous conclusion.

O salutaris hostia and *O lux beata Trinitas, tertia pars* have many features in common:⁵⁵ both are scored for six voices, three of which are canonic, and both have the same verse form comprising four hymn lines. The third and fourth lines in each setting involve repetitions of motives—free in the case of *O salutaris hostia*, exact in *O lux beata Trinitas*. Perhaps Byrd's most dissonant composition, *O salutaris hostia* is probably the earlier of these two motets, while the smooth contrapuntal writing in *O lux beata Trinitas* is free of the numerous false relations found in the earlier motet.⁵⁶ What particularly links these two compositions is that both are constructed as three-part invertible canons with three free parts. In *O salutaris hostia* the first two canonic voices are at the fifth above after one breve and the second and third canonic voices are at the octave below after one and a half breves. In *O lux beata Trinitas* the entries (quoted in Example 2) are at the fifth below and octave above (the opposite of *O salutaris*) and the time distances are one semibreve and two and a half semibreves.⁵⁷

Kerman suggested that there may have been some friendly emulation between Byrd and Alfonso Ferrabosco the Elder that was manifest in *O lux* and *O salutaris*, especially as Byrd was aware of Ferrabosco's six-part motet *Cantabo Domino*.⁵⁸ Ferrabosco also wrote a canonic setting of the last stanza of *O lux beata Trinitas*;⁵⁹ however, this six-part work is built upon a three-part parallel canon at the fifth and octave below with three free parts, a structure not found in Byrd's canonic output. The technical challenges are mitigated in Ferrabosco's *O lux* by wide temporal spacing between the first and second canonic parts so that all three canonic voices are rarely heard together. The non-canonic parts provide solid contrapuntal writing in this motet, occasionally participating in the points of imitation but often acting as textural filling (for example, the frequent semibreve progressions in the bass part throughout the piece).

⁵⁵ Modern editions in *BE* 8 44–49 and *BE* 1 69–81, respectively. The canonic third part of *O lux beata Trinitas* is prefaced by the text 'Tres partes in una in sub diapente aliud in diatessaron,' suggesting Byrd's nod towards the genre of puzzle canons where rubrics about deriving three parts from one are often found for pieces whose texts are concerned with the Trinity.

⁵⁶ This summary is drawn from *MMWB* 118–20.

⁵⁷ Kerman, *MMWB* 118, notes that *O lux* is notated *a note neri*, i.e., in a basic crotchet pulse.

⁵⁸ *MMWB* 118.

⁵⁹ See Alfonso Ferrabosco the Elder (1543–1588): *Opera Omnia I, Motets*, ed. Richard Charteris (American Institute of Musicology, Hänssler-Verlag, 1984) 58–60 and 86–90. *Cantabo Domino* is the eleventh section of the motet *Benedic anima mea, Domino. Domine Deus meus*.

In his two invertible canonic motets, Byrd approaches the canonic task in ways comparable to Ferrabosco's *Cantabo Domino*. These connections are most evident between *Cantabo* and *O salutaris*, while *O lux* is more imaginative in its treatment of canonic motives and its integration of non-canonic parts. In *Cantabo* the leading part, Tenor 2, is answered by the soprano at the octave above after one and a half breves, and Alto 1 imitates the soprano at the fifth below after a semibreve. *Cantabo* proceeds with canonic motives, usually two or three semibreves long, which are clearly separated by rests of between one and two breves. As a result, the leading part is heard only briefly with the two following parts, usually at the end of a phrase and beginning of the next one. Contrapuntal development of motives is absent in Ferrabosco's motet, which moves through a series of phrases that are similar in contour to the opening phrase, particularly in the setting of the last line of text.

In *O salutaris* the motives in the canonic parts are three to four breves in length, with rests of three and a half semibreves separating the settings of lines one and two, reduced to two and a half semibreves between lines two and three and later to one and a half between the repetitions of line four and the final Amen. This means that the first two canonic parts (i.e., the leading and first following parts) are heard together frequently but the first and third parts are seldom together.⁶⁰ This is similar but opposite to the situation in *Cantabo*, noted above, where the two following parts are mostly together but the leading part is often heard without them. The compositional task in both pieces is therefore reduced in difficulty, and the abundant rests in the canonic textures are covered by the three free parts. In *Cantabo* these are worked into the imitative texture and contain some subtleties, such as at bars 8 and 9 where the non-canonic first tenor fore-imitates the motive for the next section of text at the same time as the canonic second tenor voice is repeating the opening motive and text. In *O salutaris* the free parts provide continuous support through occasional imitation of the canonic motives or, more usually, by free counterpoint with few rests. Example 6 shows the setting of 'Quae caeli pandis hostium,' the second line of text in *O salutaris*.

Kerman maintains that *O lux beata Trinitas* improves on *O salutaris hostia* in terms of organisation, text declamation, control of dissonance, and in the strong build-up of exact transpositions in the setting of line four of the text.⁶¹ Aspects of the canonic writing can likewise be shown to have a more nuanced approach; in particular, the long time interval between the two following voices in *O lux* allows Byrd to manipulate the contrapuntal texture more imaginatively. Example 7, from *O lux*, shows how the different time distances between the canonic voices lead to overlapping canonic motives. This occurs in the third and first canonic voices (Soprano 1 and Alto 1 respectively) at bars 69–71 where lines two and three of the text overlap, and again at bars 74–76 where the third canonic voice states the motive for line three of the text against the exact repetition of this motive commencing in the first canonic voice. In these and other passages throughout *O lux*, Byrd manages to work canonic motives against themselves, thereby illustrating an increased sophistication in this motet, arguably to the highest level that he achieved in his canonic works. The non-canonic parts are more integrated with the canonic parts in *O lux* than in *O salutaris* by participating in the imitative texture and by

⁶⁰ There is only one exception to this before the final Amen—at the repetition of the word 'hostilia' in line three of the text, bars 18–19, where all six voices are heard together. The repetition of this word does not occur when line three is repeated in the following bars.

⁶¹ *MMWB* 118–19.

Example 6. Byrd, *O salutaris hostia*, bb. 9–13

The musical score consists of two systems of six staves each. The first system covers measures 9-13, and the second system covers measures 14-18. The lyrics are distributed across the staves as follows:

- System 1, Staff 1 (Soprano): Quae cae - li
- System 1, Staff 2 (Alto 1): sti - - a, Quae
- System 1, Staff 3 (Alto 2): Quae cae - li pan - dis ho -
- System 1, Staff 4 (Tenor 1): dis,
- System 1, Staff 5 (Tenor 2): ho - sti - -
- System 1, Staff 6 (Bass): a,
- System 2, Staff 1 (Soprano): pan - - dis ho - sti - - um;
- System 2, Staff 2 (Alto 1): cae - li pan - dis ho - sti - -
- System 2, Staff 3 (Alto 2): - sti - - um;
- System 2, Staff 4 (Tenor 1): - - - um, quae cae -
- System 2, Staff 5 (Tenor 2): Quae cae - li pan - dis ho - sti -
- System 2, Staff 6 (Bass): - um, quae cae - li

providing countermotives (for example, Alto 2 contributes to a stretto effect in bar 75). Other subtleties include strong resemblances between canonic motives heard at different parts of the work: for instance, the second statement of the fourth line of text (bars 85–90) resembles the opening motive of the work, and the motive used in the third and fourth statements of line four recalls the motive used in the setting of line three.

Quomodo cantabimus, Byrd's last canonic motet, is similarly informed by a sophisticated treatment of motives. In this eight-part work the first bass and first alto are at the octave above in similar motion after three breves followed by the second alto, after another three breves, in unison with the first alto but in contrary motion. An even texture is provided by the non-canonic parts, which hold Byrd's piece together despite the large time distances

Example 8. Byrd, *Quomodo cantabimus*, bb. 51–60

si non me-mi - ne-ro tu - i,
 mi - ne-ro tu - i, me-mi - ne-ro tu - i, si non me -
 * si non me - mi - ne-ro tu - i,
 i, si non me - mi - ne
 i. si non me - mi - ne ro tu - i
 * ne-ro tu - i, si non me-mi - ne ro tu -
 i, si non me-mi - ne-ro tu - i, si non me-mi - ne-ro
 si non me - mi - ne-ro tu - i,
 mi - ne-ro tu - i, si non me - mi - ne-ro -
 si non me - mi - ne-ro tu -
 ro tu - i,
 me mi - ne-ro tu - i, si non me - mi - ne-ro tu - i,
 i, si non me - mi - ne-ro tu - i, si
 non me - mi - ne-ro tu - i, me - mi - ne
 tu - i, me - mi - ne - ro, si non me - mi - ne-ro tu

parts so that the distinction between leader and followers becomes blurred.⁶³ This effect is brought about by contrary motion imitation at the twelfth in the treatise example and at the octave in *Quomodo*. In Example 8, the third presentation of the text in the leading part (bass) follows stretto-like the second presentation of text in the second following part (alto 2), thus creating the impression of reversed leading and following roles. The free parts contribute to this effect by having points of imitation in similar motion for the first presentation of the text but introducing both regular and inverted forms midway through the second presentation and during the third. For instance, see the mirror-like imitation between the first superius and second altus at bars 53–55.

Byrd's motets show a mastery of different canonic structures and a capacity to apply them in works of considerable length. He drew upon Tallis's ability to employ canonic imitation in large-scale works and Ferrabosco's structural planning according to multi-voice canonic textures previously rarely found in English repertoire. Comparison to Ferrabosco's canonic motets in particular can reinforce our understanding of the interaction between these two composers in the creation of their works. However, the sophistication of Byrd's compositional planning in which he was able to manipulate canonic imitation in imaginative and technically virtuosic ways sets his music far apart from the efforts of his contemporaries in England. Having traced Byrd's accomplishments to the late 1570s and 1580s, it is now appropriate to survey the development of English canon in the following decades and Byrd's impact upon it.

English Canon and Byrd's Later Years

After the mid-1580s Byrd seems to have abandoned canonic writing in his large-scale vocal works. This may be explained not only by the obsolescence of the motet but also by the death of Tallis and the departure of Ferrabosco the Elder from England, both of whom had probably stimulated Byrd's interests in canon. Later generations of composers continued to explore different types of canon, but the canonic motets of the Elizabethan masters are unmatched in scale by anything in later English repertoires. Morley reported a 'vertuous contention' between Byrd and Ferrabosco that gave rise to canons by both composers on the plainsong *Miserere*. However, these were apparently never published.⁶⁴ In later centuries, Byrd's name was associated with a large number of mostly plainsong-based canons, almost all of which were found to be spurious by the editors of the Byrd Edition who only included two miscellaneous canons—the contrary motion canon found in Morley's treatise and a six-part polymorphous canon.⁶⁵ Canonic writing is occasionally found in Byrd's later instrumental music: the upper parts of the five-part consort *Fantasia* has a canon at the fourth above, and the five-part keyboard pavan G6 has a canon at the fifth below, also in the upper two parts.⁶⁶

⁶³ BE 16, ed. Philip Brett (London: Stainer & Bell, 1971) 169–70.

⁶⁴ Morley, *Introduction* 115. It is not clear whether Morley, writing in 1597, is referring to Alfonso Ferrabosco the Elder or Younger. The former is assumed by scholars who touch on this matter, but the latter was also an accomplished contrapuntist.

⁶⁵ Both in BE 16. See also Brett, 'Did Byrd Write *Non Nobis Domine?*,' *Musical Times* 113 (1972): 855–7.

⁶⁶ For a discussion of the motivic development and harmonic progressions in these pieces, see Oliver Neighbour, *The Consort and Keyboard Music of William Byrd* (London: Faber & Faber, 1978) 74–6 and 187–9.

Canonic writing in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries is characterised by a tremendous burst of production of short canons, many of which were arranged in collections ranging from a few dozen to over a thousand. Much of this material survives in manuscript form by unknown composers (including a set of canons once attributed to Byrd⁶⁷), with only two publications of canons appearing in the 1590s.⁶⁸ The didactic orientation of the manuscript collections is evident in the arrangement of canons in groups according to the number of parts present, the devices employed (regular, contrary or retrograde motion, augmentation, diminution), and the interval of imitation and time distance between the parts. Settings of canons over plainsongs were very popular, as evidenced by 1,163 two-part canons on *Miserere* by George Waterhouse, a collection of over three hundred canons, mostly on *Miserere*, attributed to Elway Bevin, and over one hundred *Miserere* canons by John Bull.⁶⁹ Little of the canonic writing in the seventeenth-century published repertoire explores the more arcane contrapuntal craftsmanship that permeates the manuscript collections.

There was little interest in canon or imitative counterpoint more generally in the early history of the Reformed Church in England. This reflects a preference for clarity through homophonic setting and the sectional nature of this repertoire in which verses of text are clearly set apart by cadences. Canonic writing is confined to two short passages in Byrd's Second and Third Services⁷⁰ and a Tallis fragment,⁷¹ while imitative passages that come close to strict two-part canonic writing are found in the Magnificat of Thomas Morley's Short Service, the Benedictus of Elway Bevin's Short Service, and the Magnificat from Tomkins's Third Service. In the final doxology from the Nunc Dimittis of Orlando Gibbons's Short Service, there is a canon at the fourth below between the upper two parts with two other non-canonic parts present.⁷² Lionel Pike has observed that this is one of the first fully-fledged examples of contrapuntal writing to invade the Puritanical austerity of the Reformed style in English church music.⁷³ This relates to the growing tendency by Gibbons and others to offset the generally homophonic textures in services of the period. Another isolated instance is Thomas Tomkins's Communion Service Prayer 'Turn thou us, O good Lord,' a four-part parallel canon at the fifth, octave and twelfth below.⁷⁴

The discussion of Byrd's motets and the context of English canonic repertoires in the present article may serve as a basis upon which to explore further aspects of advanced contrapuntal

⁶⁷ British Library Add. MS 31,391.

⁶⁸ Thomas Whythorne, *Duos, or Songs for Two Voices* (London: Thomas East, 1590). The fifteen canons appear in Thomas Whythorne, *Fifteen Duos in Canon (1590) for Diverse Recorders*, ed. Walter Bergmann (London: Schott, 1955). See also John Farmer, *Divers & Sundry Waies of Two Parts in One, to the Number of Fortie upon one Playnson* (London: Thomas East, 1591).

⁶⁹ Waterhouse's 1,163 canons on the *Miserere* plainsong are found in Cambridge University Library manuscript Dd.iv.60; canons attributed to Bevin are in British Library RM 24.c.14; anonymous canons on *Laudate Dominum omnes gentes* are in British Library RM 24.d.12; Bull's canons are in Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Mus. Hs. 17.771.

⁷⁰ BE 10a: The English Services, ed. Craig Monson (London: Stainer & Bell, 1980) 132–3, 140–1.

⁷¹ See note 36, above.

⁷² TCM 4: Orlando Gibbons: Services and Anthems, ed. E. H. Fellowes, et al. (London: OUP, 1925) 66–7.

⁷³ Lionel Pike, 'Church Music I: Before the Civil War,' in *Music in Britain: The Seventeenth Century*, ed. Ian Spink, Blackwell History of Music in Britain 3 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992) 69.

⁷⁴ A transcription is in *EECM* 27, Thomas Tomkins: 'Musica Deo sacra' 4, ed. Bernard Rose (London: Stainer & Bell, 1982) 132–8.

writing among later English composers. For instance, the series of short canonic sections found in services by William Child, John Blow and Henry Purcell and the occasional canonic settings by Purcell and Henry Lawes may have arisen in part as tributes to Byrd and other Elizabethan masters.⁷⁵ That these later pieces employ many of the same structural procedures, albeit on a smaller scale, may attest to the significance and longevity of the influence of the Elizabethan masters, most especially Byrd, on the creative impulse of subsequent generations of English composers.

⁷⁵ These pieces are treated briefly in Ian Spink, *Restoration Cathedral Music 1660–1714* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995) 129–30, 152–3, and in Peter Holman, *Henry Purcell* (Oxford: OUP, 1994) 106–7.