

Religious Melancholy in the Music of John Dowland

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## ABSTRACT

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(Under the direction of Dr. Anne MacNeil)

This study examines the religious music of John Dowland as it relates to his association with the Elizabethan cult of melancholy. In examining his music, I have distinguished several different types of melancholy and I feel that Dowland's musical treatment of these types is more nuanced than has yet been recognized. While scholars from the early modern era realized that the complaint of melancholy was a highly complex, multi-faceted issue, modern scholars tend to identify the melancholy tendencies of Dowland's music as a one-dimensional concept. By exploring the expression of religious melancholy in the music of Dowland through the lens of contemporaneous medical and religious treatises, I am applying the early seventeenth-century conception of melancholy in my own interpretation of Dowland's religious-themed music.

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## **Religious Melancholy in the Music of John Dowland**

### **Chapter 1 Introduction**

English society during the Early Modern era was fascinated with the idea of melancholy. Scholars studied it, poets wrote of it, and aristocrats spent long hours wallowing in it. This interest in the darker side of life is reflected even in the music of the time, most notably that of John Dowland. In examining his music, I have distinguished several different types of melancholy, and I feel that Dowland's treatment of these types is more nuanced than has yet been recognized. While scholars from the Early Modern era realized that the complaint of melancholy was a highly complex, multi-faceted issue, modern scholars tend to identify the melancholy tendencies of Dowland's music as a one-dimensional concept. By exploring the expression of religious melancholy in the music of Dowland through the lens of contemporaneous medical and religious treatises, I am applying the early seventeenth-century conception of melancholy in my own interpretation of Dowland's religious-themed music.

For years, scholars have associated Dowland's melancholy tendencies with those expressed in a 1621 medical treatise entitled *The Anatomy of Melancholy* by Robert Burton.<sup>1</sup> This particular association is not entirely accurate for a number of

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<sup>1</sup> Some of the primary sources that compare Dowland's melancholy to that of Burton are: Anthony Rooley, "New Light on John Dowland's Songs of Darkness," in *Early Music* 11, no. 1, Tenth Anniversary Issue (Jan., 1983), 6–21, and Robin Headlam Wells, "John Dowland and Elizabethan Melancholy," in *Early Music* 13, no. 4 (Nov., 1985), 514–28.

reasons. Primarily, the final works that Dowland published were written in 1621, the same year as the publication of Burton's treatise. Secondly, radical changes of thinking took place in England around the time of Burton's treatise that would have impacted how scholars and musicians alike related to ideas of religious melancholy. This shift is evident when one examines religious-themed music written before and after 1621.

It is more accurate to discuss the melancholy exhibited in Dowland's music in terms of two earlier treatises: Timothy Bright's 1586 work *A Treatise on Melancholie* and William Perkins' 1606 publication *A Whole Treatise of Cases of Conscience*. These works were not only in circulation while Dowland was writing his music, but demonstrate similar types of spiritual and emotional issues to those evident in Dowland's work.

Melancholy as a disease during the Early Modern era is a highly complex topic. Little was understood at the time regarding causes, symptoms or treatments, and it is important to remember that often a diagnosis of melancholy was given to a patient when a doctor simply had no other definitive diagnosis, thus opening the door to the infinite variety of "melancholic" conditions. In the music of Dowland, I have identified four distinct types of melancholy, and each is expressed by its own unique musical vocabulary.

I categorize the melancholic types of Dowland's music according to the content of their text. The first I am calling "true melancholy." Simply put, true melancholy is similar in today's parlance to clinical depression. The second is love melancholy,



or erotic melancholy.<sup>2</sup> We might refer to this as lovesickness or the pangs of unrequited love. The third relates to failed ambition, the often extraordinary lengths to which a person will go to achieve their goals, and the depths to which they will sink should they fail to attain them. The final type evident in Dowland's music is a kind of spiritual or religious melancholy.<sup>3</sup> Of all the types of melancholy outlined, the musical characteristics associated with religious melancholy are the most strikingly consistent in Dowland's works. Therefore, this is the focus of my study.

In order to explore the Early Modern English conception of religious melancholy, I begin in Chapter 2 by examining the medical and religious treatises of Bright, Perkins and Burton. Examining these three treatises highlights the evolution of thought that surround issues of religious melancholy throughout the first quarter of the seventeenth century. This discussion clarifies the great divide in thinking that occurred in the years between the writings of Perkins' and Burton's texts, and explores some of the social, political and religious reasons for why this may have occurred. In Chapter 3, I show how Dowland expressed religious melancholy in his music by looking at nine lute songs which entertain these themes. In addition, I also examine his entire corpus of psalm settings and canticles, some of which are melancholic and some not, in order to show how these are set differently. This analysis will establish that Dowland's music enacted a specific collection of musical gestures to express a consistent conception of religious melancholy. In Chapter 4,

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<sup>2</sup> For an extended discussion on issues of music as it relates to Early Modern love melancholy, see Linda Phyllis Austern, "Musical Treatment for Lovesickness: The Early Modern Heritage," in *Music as Medicine: The History of Music Therapy Since Antiquity*, ed. Peregrine Holden (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> As scholarly and religious views on these matters shift, the emphasis on personal, spiritual angst moves to a sense of institutional mistrust. In a way, "spiritual melancholy" becomes "religious melancholy."

this view will be broadened by an examination of composers writing before and after Dowland, to demonstrate the changes that occurred surrounding the publication of Burton's book. The works preceding Burton's publication will be five religious songs and psalm settings by William Byrd. The works following Burton are by three composers: Henry Lawes, his brother William Lawes, and John Hilton. The songs of these three composers were all set in the 1630s and early 40s, and were chosen for this study specifically because enough time had passed for Burton's text to make its full and lasting impact, but the English Civil Wars had not yet begun, which brought with them new attitudes toward religious tolerance.

In the course of this study, I seek to demonstrate that the writings of Timothy Bright on medicine and William Perkins' writings on religion are much more applicable to Dowland's expressions of religious melancholy than Burton's treatise. As society's outlook on religion and mankind's emotional world change over time, so does the music that expresses these views.

## Chapter 2

### Shifting Perceptions in Religious Melancholy: Bright, Perkins and Burton

The views concerning religious melancholy expressed by English scholars in the Early Modern era underwent a radical shift during the first quarter of the seventeenth-century. The focus of the earliest religious and medical scholars in England who concerned themselves with the issues of religious melancholy was to establish the difference between pathological illness and religious guilt. Much of this concern over levels of guilt and sin stemmed from the emergence of the Calvinist and Puritan religions. Among the first English scholars to study these distinctions between melancholy and religious guilt were the clergymen Timothy Bright and William Perkins, writing in the 1580s and 90s. This connection between religious piety and guilt echoes quite clearly in Ben Jonson's 1616 poem "To Heaven," where the author calls for a separation of his feelings of guilt and his feelings of melancholy.

Good, and great God, can I not thinke of thee,  
But it must, straight, my melancholy bee?  
Is it interpreted in me disease,  
That, laden with my sinnes, I seeke for ease?<sup>1</sup>

This conception of melancholy and guilt as two distinct conditions underwent a significant change during the 1620s. This change is evidenced in

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<sup>1</sup> Ben Jonson. *The Poems of Ben Jonson*. Bernard H. Newdigate, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936), 82.

Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, published in 1621. Burton's conception of religious melancholy was no longer one that focused on sin and guilt, but rather, one that established melancholy as an indicator of religious excess, impropriety, and even heresy, aimed at the Puritans and other alternative religious groups.

A brief look at historical events of the time will do much to explain the difference in outlook for these scholars. Bright and Perkins were writing during the reign of Elizabeth I, a moderately tolerant ruler who, while somewhat wary of Catholics, was open to the relatively new values embraced by Calvinism. By the time of Burton's treatise, the spread of Calvinism in continental Europe had led to the Thirty Years War. Elizabeth had been succeeded by James I, who faced several threats to his reign, such as the Gunpowder Plot and increasing demands for religious freedom from the Puritans. The Anglican church and the English government had both become more wary of religious schismatics who did not embrace their ideals.

Timothy Bright wrote in his *A Treatise of Melancholy* of 1586 that the primary method for determining whether a person suffers from religious melancholy is to treat them as if they struggled with guilt and to recommend confession and prayers for forgiveness. If that did not cure their symptoms, the source of the problem was deemed to be medical. Having worked as both a physician and an Anglican clergyman gave Bright a particularly advantageous viewpoint into matters of religious melancholy. His treatise introduces the concepts related to religious melancholy in chapters 32–34, entitled “Of the

affliction of conscience for sinne,” “Whether the conscience of sinne and the affliction thereof be melancholy or not,” and “The particular difference betwixt melancholy, & the distressed conscience in the same person.”

Many of Bright’s theories of melancholic temperament are based on the humoral theories of Galen. The theories of Galen show that an excess of black bile, or melancholer, could result in a personality that was depressed and sad, but also creative. According to Bright, melancholy was “a dotting [or decay] of reason through vain fear procured by the fault of the melancholie humour.”<sup>2</sup> In contrast, he defines religious guilt as “that heavy hande of God upon the afflicted conscience, tormented with remorse of sinne, and feare of his judgement.”<sup>3</sup> Guilt injures the conscience and the soul, whereas a melancholic person is affected in the imagination, making it a completely man-made phenomenon. The cures for these various afflictions differ as well. While melancholy may be relieved by medicine and a change in diet and physical environment, the only cure for a guilty conscience is confession and repentance.

Where the divisions between Bright’s conceptions of guilt and melancholy begin to slip is in cases where treatment is not sought or not effective. Bright notes that the untreated melancholic may turn to troubling behavior that loses him favor in the eyes of God. This is in part because the weakness of the melancholic mind makes him more prone to lapses of reason and the temptations of sin:

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<sup>2</sup> Timothy Bright, *A Treatise of Melancholy* (London: Thomas Vautrollier, 1586; fasc. ed., New York: Columbia University Press, 1940), “The Epistle Dedicatorie: To the Right Worshipful M. Peter Osbourne, &c.,” 3.

<sup>3</sup> Bright, fol. iv (verso).

When the curious melancholy carrieth the minde into the sense of such miseries as exceed humayne capacity, and is desirous to know more than is revealed in the word of truth: or being ignorant of that which is revealed through importune inquirie, of a sudden falleth into that gulfe of Gods secret counselles which swalloweth up all conceit of man or angell.<sup>4</sup>

In other words, the melancholic ignores prudent judgment and defies the word of God in order to obtain things and knowledge that he believes God has withheld from him. Ultimately, Bright establishes three criteria for evaluating the difference between religious guilt and melancholy. First, if a person's troubles cannot be explained by natural cause, they must be of a religious nature. Second, if the intensity of the illness cannot be explained by natural means, it must be supernatural in source. Third, if the melancholy can only be cured through spiritual means, the cause of the sorrow must also be spiritual in nature.

By the first criterion, a certain impact of body upon soul in the case of a guilty conscience is granted, but the extent of that impact, unable to be explained naturally, must be referred beyond nature to the supernatural cause of God. By the second criterion, the torment of the guilty soul achieves an excruciating intensity which cannot be accounted for by any efficient cause save God alone. And by the third criterion, calling for a cure adequate to the cause, "The comfort is not procured by any corporeal instruments, no neither is the discomfort procured or increased that way; moreover the cause, the subject, the proper effects are more that corporal. For although in that case the heart is heavy, delivering a passion answerable to the fearfull apprehension, yet the sense of those that are under this crosse feeble and anguish farre beyond all affliction of natural passion coupled with that organically feare and heaviness of heart."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Bright, *Treatise*, 199.

<sup>5</sup> Noel L. Brann, "The Problem of Distinguishing Religious Guilt from Religious Melancholy in the English Renaissance," *Journal of the Rocky Mountain Medieval and Renaissance Association* 1 (1980), 67. Brann quotes Bright, 197–98.

Bright recognizes that confronting the natural causes of melancholy before the spiritual ones can cause a person to become overwhelmed by the weight of their past transgressions, “The melancholy disposeth to feare, doubt, distrust, and heavinesse, but all either without cause, or where there is cause above it enforceth the passion,”<sup>6</sup> meaning that they must rely more than ever on their faith to see them through this difficult transition. So while Bright’s *A Treatise of Melancholie* aims to discern between the afflictions of religious guilt and a melancholic temperament, in many ways the text merely blurs the issue.

William Perkins and Timothy Bright were contemporaries, and as they both taught at Cambridge, it is possible that they may have known one another, though this has not been recorded. Both men were religious scholars, but while Bright was a moderate Anglican, Perkins practiced the more radically moralist Puritan religion. Both viewed religious melancholy as the result of a guilty conscience and sought to clearly differentiate between the hardship caused by imbalanced humours and those caused by sin, an important distinction when it comes to determining one’s potential for salvation and the role of religion in salvation.

William Perkins published several religious treatises throughout the 1590s, becoming the leading scholar of his day on scriptural solutions to ethical and moral dilemmas, but he was not always devout. His early life was given to bouts of drunkenness and reckless behavior. It was while he was a young man that he overheard a woman scolding her child that he should become like “Drunken Perkins” that he turned his life to religious devotion. His most far-

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<sup>6</sup> Bright, *Treatise*, 198.

reaching and comprehensive text was *A Whole Treatise of the Cases of Conscience*, published posthumously in 1606.

Like Bright, Perkins outlines the distinction between conditions associated with melancholy and those associated with guilt and the conscience. Perkins sees melancholy as a disease that develops in two stages, the first concerning the humors and the second the emotions:

The first is in the brain and the head. For this humour being corrupted, it sends up noysome fumes as clouds or mists which do corrupt the imagination, and make the instrument of reason unfit for understanding & sense. Hence follows the first effect, strange imaginations, conceits and opinions framed in the mind... There is a concord and consent between the heart and brain and thought and affections: the heart affecting nothing but that which the mind conceiveth.<sup>7</sup>

As strange as the language of Perkins' writing may sound to modern ears, the scholar was praised by his contemporaries for his plain, functional prose and his ability to clarify important religious and ethical issues for people of all walks of life.<sup>8</sup>

For Perkins, true religious guilt was a completely different condition than that caused by an imbalance of the humors. Religious guilt troubled the conscience and caused the wrath of God, but natural melancholy merely caused a disturbed imagination and irrational fears. Perkins identified two degrees of what he terms "distress of minde," that is, the type of disorder caused by sin and guilt: the lesser form of this type of spiritual crisis is fear of condemnation.

Greater than fear is despair:

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<sup>7</sup> Perkins, *Whole Treatise*, 47.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas F. Merrill, "Introduction," *William Perkins: His Pioneer Works on Casuistry: "A Discourse on Conscience" and "The Whole Treatise of Cases of Conscience"* (Nieuwkoop, The Netherlands: B. De Graaf, 1966), x.



When a man is without all hope of salvation, in his owne sense and apprehension...it is not a distinct kind of trouble of mind, but the highest degree. For every distresse in the minde, is a feare of condemnation, and comes at length from desperation, if it be not cured... This sorrow may be discerned in this sort: The heart of him in whome it is, is so affected, that though there were no conscience, no devill to accuse, no hell for condemnation; yet it would be grieved in it selfe, because God by sinne is displeased and offended.<sup>9</sup>

In other words, despair, the worst kind of pain, stemmed purely from a damaged relationship with God caused by one's own sin. All melancholy of this spiritual, personal kind was caused by sin, which was the result of temptation, according to Perkins, and again, temptations came in two guises: "temptations of trial," or those that tested a man's faith, and "temptations of seducement," where a man was tempted to draw away from God and toward evil.<sup>10</sup> These types of evil included the Devil's blasphemous temptations, man's own sin, and the evils of the corrupted and depraved imagination.

According to Perkins, the cure for a distress of mind caused by excessive guilt through sin also differed from an effective cure for natural melancholy. The only cure for conditions of religious guilt according to Perkins was, "the *Applying of the promise* of life everlasting, in and by the life of Christ. For no physicke, no art of skill of man, can cure a wounded and distressed conscience, but onely the blood of Christ."<sup>11</sup> Should this fail to be entirely effective, Perkins proposed a three-phase method for curing distress. The first step was acknowledgement of the problem. Second, it must be determined whether a

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<sup>9</sup> Perkins, *His Pioneer Works on Casuistry*, 123.

<sup>10</sup> Perkins, *His Pioneer Works on Casuistry*, 118–19.

<sup>11</sup> Perkins, *His Pioneer Works on Casuistry*, 119.

person's troubles stemmed from natural melancholy or spiritual woes, so that the word of God was not used inappropriately. Finally, the distressed individual must confess his sins in order to receive true relief.

Much as in Bright's treatise, the distinctions between natural and religious melancholies begin to blur for Perkins. He claims that a natural melancholy must be changed into a religious one:

The nature of worldly sorrow must be altered, by beeing turned, and changed into sorrow according to God...Men that are troubled with worldly sorrow in their distress:...turne the course of their grief, by causing them to grieve, not for worldly respects, or onely in consideration of the punishment, due unto them for their sinnes, but principally for the very offence of God, in, and by their sinnes committed.... This done... care must be had that this sorrow for sinne be not confused, but a distinct sorrow. The man that is in sorrow must not be grieved onely, because he is as other men are, a sinner; but more especially for this, and that particular sinne, by which it comes to passe, that he is such, or such a sinner; so that his sorrow in respect of sinne, may be distinct.<sup>12</sup>

So while the natural melancholic must not forget that he is, by his very nature, a sinner and should see his sorrows as a result of his wrongdoings, he must not allow the depths of his sin and guilt to overwhelm him and cause further melancholy, but rather, must embrace the teachings of the church and allow for God's forgiveness.

While both Bright and Perkins wrote of the distinctions between natural melancholy and religious guilt, they differed in their conceptions of the relationship between the two. Whereas Bright believed that an excess of natural melancholy could lead a person to commit sin, as the very presence of melancholy indicates that one's relationship with God has been compromised,

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<sup>12</sup> Perkins, *His Pioneer Works on Casuistry*, 120.

Perkins believed that natural melancholy on its own was not sufficient to cause a crisis of conscience causing religious melancholy, but as stated in the Pauline doctrine:

As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting, for you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret, but worldly grief produces death.<sup>13</sup>

The shift from natural melancholy to one of religious guilt, not only can, but must occur in order to allow for forgiveness and salvation.<sup>14</sup>

In the years following the publications of Bright's and Perkins' treatises, the liminal space that separated the conditions of natural melancholy and that stemming from the guilty conscience continued to merge and blur. This is most evident in the next major treatise to be written on issues of melancholy, Robert Burton's *An Anatomy of Melancholy*, written in 1621.

Burton was ordained a minister at Christ Church at Oxford in 1614, and much of his writing on religious issues pertain to matters of promoting the Anglican religion over that of the Calvinists, Puritans, and other burgeoning movements that threatened the political authority of the crown. All forms of melancholy, according to Burton, are the result of an over-active imagination and misplaced convictions. In terms of religious melancholy, this is expressed in devotion to an improper religious path. It is no longer an aspect of conscience, but rather, a condition in which the melancholic suffers from a fractured relationship with God. Burton considers this to be an variation of hero

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<sup>13</sup> II Cor. 7:9–10. RSV.

<sup>14</sup> Brann, 65.

or love-related melancholy, noting that for most people the object of their love is women, and for others, it is God. Religious melancholy, therefore, is a result of misguidance, in short, Puritanical belief. Burton writes that the religious melancholic suffers not because of his sin, but because of the inappropriate closeness he feels he has with God.

Much of Burton's discussion of religion is devoted to questioning the beliefs of others:

Of this number are all superstitious idolaters, ethnics, Mahometans, Jews, heretics, enthusiasts, diviners, prophets, sectaries, and schismatics. Zanchius reduceth such infidels to four chief sects; but I will insist and follow mine own intended method: all which with many other curious persons, monks, hermits, &c., may be ranged in this extreme, and fight under this superstitious banner, with those rude idiots, and infinite swarms of people that are seduced by them. In the other extreme or in defect, march those impious epicures, libertines, atheists, hypocrites, infidels, worldly, secure, impenitent, unthankful, and carnal-minded men, that attribute all to natural causes, that will acknowledge no supreme power; that have cauterised consciences, or live in a reprobate sense; or such desperate persons as are too distrustful of his mercies. Of these there be many subdivisions, diverse degrees of madness and folly, some more than other, as shall be shown in the symptoms: and yet all miserably out, perplexed, doting, and beside themselves for religion's sake.<sup>15</sup>

Melancholy is caused by choosing the wrong path to God, either through the moralist views of the Puritans and Calvinists (who Burton calls enthusiasts and schismatics) or through religious practices that conflict with those of the Anglican church, such as those of Jews, Muslims (Mahometans) or Catholics.

Burton's book was so popular that it has since eclipsed the views espoused by Bright and Perkins. By the mid-seventeenth century, Burton's ideas and language were adopted by Platonic scholars at Cambridge, such as Meric

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<sup>15</sup> Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2001), 1159.

Casaubon and Henry More, whose anti-Puritanical writings, “transformed enthusiasm from a state of divine rapture to a pathological condition.”<sup>16</sup> These views also influenced the writings of Jonathan Swift which were aimed against the Puritans. It became commonplace to dismiss those of alternative religious beliefs as merely suffering from melancholy. This negative view toward the Puritans and Calvinists can be seen as late as 1689, sixty-eight years after the publication of Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy*, in John Locke’s *An Essay*

*Concerning Human Understanding*:

Hence we see that in all ages men, in whom melancholy has mixed with devotion, or whose conceit of themselves has raised them into an opinion of a greater familiarity with God, and a nearer admittance to his favour, than is afforded to others, have often flattered themselves with a persuasion of an immediate intercourse with Deity, and frequent communications with the Divine Spirit.<sup>17</sup>

But where did Burton’s anti-Puritanical theories come from? A glance at this letter written by Archbishop George Abbott may shed some light on the matter:

You are therefore to know, that his majesty [James I] being much troubled and grieved at heart to hear every day of so many defections from our religion to Popery and Anabaptism or other points of separation in some part of this kingdom, and considering with much admiration what might be the cause thereof, especially in the reign of such a king who doth so constantly profess himself an open adversary to the superstition of the one and the madness of the other.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Adam H. Kitzes, *The Politics of Melancholy From Spencer to Milton* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 155.

<sup>17</sup> John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding In Focus*, ed. Gary Fuller (London: Routledge, 2000), 129.

<sup>18</sup> George Abbott, “Archbishop Abbott’s Letter Regarding Preaching,” *Records of the Old Archdeaconry of St. Albans: A Calendar of Papers A.D. 1575 to A.D. 1637*, ed. H. R. Wilton Hall (St. Albans, 1908), 150–52. The term Anabaptist refers to a Protestant sect that believed that the rite of Baptism should be postponed until a practitioner is old enough to account for their own beliefs, the Puritans followed this custom.

Suddenly it becomes clear that much of Burton's anti-Puritan rhetoric was in response to goings-on in the church itself and in the government, resulting in attitudes which were rapidly spilling over into the public-at-large.

It is curious to note that the theories of all three authors apply only to men; the notion prevailed that women could not be melancholic because of a Ficinian association of melancholy with qualities which women were thought unable to possess, such as imagination, genius, and inspiration.<sup>19</sup> Because of this, women who engaged in melancholic behaviors were often seen as witches or diagnosed with "womb frenzy"; this led to erotic objectification of the mentally ill and to scorn from moralists.<sup>20</sup>

As I have argued, the writings of Timothy Bright, William Perkins, and Robert Burton demonstrate a marked difference in conceptions of religious melancholy from the late-sixteenth and the early-seventeenth-centuries to the mid-to late-seventeenth-century. The views espoused by these authors reflect shifting attitudes in religious tolerance over the course of the century which, in turn, result in shifting conceptions of religious melancholy. Earlier definitions of religious melancholy incorporate ideas of acceptance and toleration of religious difference, whereas post-Burton conceptions of religious melancholy integrate more restrictive ideas of suspicion and prejudice.

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<sup>19</sup> For a discussion of inspired melancholy as related to the music of John Dowland, see Anthony Rooley, "New Light on John Dowland's Songs of Darkness," in *Early Music* 11, no. 1, Tenth Anniversary Issue (Jan., 1983), 6–21.

<sup>20</sup> Amanda Eubanks Winkler, *O Let Us Howle Some Heavy Note: Music For Witches, The Melancholic, and the Mad on the Seventeenth-Century English Stage* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2006), 13–14.

### Chapter 3

#### **The Religious Music of John Dowland: An Analysis for Melancholy**

The religious music of John Dowland falls into one of three genres: lute songs with religious texts, psalm settings, and canticles. While not all of Dowland's religious music expresses undertones of melancholy, much of it does, and I concentrate my investigation on these works. My material focus, therefore, consists of nine religious and melancholy lute songs, eleven psalm settings, of which six are melancholy and five are not, and four melancholy canticles. In my analyses, I identify six distinct musical gestures that occur consistently in the lute songs and four that carry over to the melancholy psalm settings and canticles. The resulting configuration of musical gestures establishes an association of Dowland's compositional practices with the conceptions of religious melancholy reflected in the works of Timothy Bright and William Perkins.

Dowland's lute songs are among his best-known works and they most explicitly demonstrate his expressions of melancholy. Of his eighty-eight published songs, I label nine as songs of religious melancholy. The earliest of these works appear in his *Second Book of Songs and Ayres* of 1600. The texts of "Time's eldest son, Old Age," "Then sit thee down" and "When others sing *Venite*," show a public demonstration of loyalty to the Queen and to the Anglican Church. These texts were most likely written by Sir Henry Lee, Master of Ordnance and Royal Armories under Queen

Elizabeth I, who had a reputation for working to create peaceful relations among the Queen and her subjects.<sup>1</sup> These songs function as a narrative unit, implying that the lyrics work together to tell a story. “Time’s eldest son” speaks of a man’s turn to the spiritual side of life once youth and strength have left him. “Then sit thee down” is an expression of the sanctity of the Church of England. “When others sing *Venite*” compares Anglican prayer to Catholic prayer, and determines that the English style is more devout.

As its title suggests, Dowland’s 1612 publication *A Pilgrim’s Solace* dwells on issues of melancholy and includes six songs that conform to my definition of religious melancholy. Three of these songs, “Thou mighty God,” “When David’s life,” and “When the poor cripple,” function as a narrative unit. These songs not only tell a story, but also contain intertextual references, culminating with the final lyric, “No David, Job, nor cripple in more grief, Christ give me patience and my hope’s relief.” The lyrics have a common theme of redemption through faith and the songs share the same key area (no flats in the key signature, what we today would call A minor) and time signature (C). These songs treat the subject of patience, hope and the love of Christ in dealing with suffering in life. The first song tells the story of Job and how patience soothed his suffering and allowed him to remain hopeful. The second song in the set, “When David’s life,” describes David’s reliance on hope rather than revenge against Saul. “When the poor cripple” tells of how the man by the pool at Bethesda was healed by the love of Christ. The remaining three songs in *A Pilgrim’s Solace* are independent compositions. “In this trembling shadow” deals

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<sup>1</sup> In 1598, Lee attempted to reconcile Robert Devereaux, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl of Essex with the Queen. Essex had been her favored courtier until his lust for power led him to several treasonous acts. Essex was executed at the Tower of London in 1601.



with the hope that one's praising of the Lord will help alleviate his suffering. "If that a sinner's sighs" declares the hope that God will accept sadness as an offering to the angels. Finally, "Where sin sore wounding" discusses the suffering that is caused by sin and the relief that comes from confession and repentance.

Dowland's psalm and canticle settings provide a testing ground for my theory. While all are clearly religious, not all are melancholic. Comparison of the melancholic and non-melancholic psalm and canticle settings shows which of the musical gestures that I associate with Dowland's musical conception of religious melancholy can truly be applied to this concept. A gesture appearing in a religious song that is not melancholic is suspect, as is any gesture occurring in a lute song that is melancholic but not religious. Using this test, I have found that two of the musical markers identified in Dowland's lute songs are merely indicative of his religious music in general.

There are three melancholy canticles, or settings of liturgical songs not based on psalm texts, that use all six of the musical markers of religious melancholy that I originally located in the lute songs. All of these canticles are part of the collection of seven pieces known as *Lamentatio Henrici Noel* which were composed to commemorate the death of Mr. Henry Noell. Noell was a friend and patron of Dowland's who tried unsuccessfully to gain a position for the composer with the court of Queen Elizabeth in 1597. The first of these lamentations, "The Humble Complaint of a Sinner," is based on Cantic 18. "The Humble Suit of a Sinner" is based on Cantic 9. The third canticle setting, based on Cantic 8, is entitled "The

Lamentation of a Sinner.” All three use pre-existing melodies taken from the 1562 English Metrical Psalter.

Dowland composed six psalm settings based on texts that would be characterized as melancholic in nature. Four of these settings complete the *Lamentatio Henrici Noel* collection together with Dowland’s settings of Psalms 6, (“Lord, in thy wrath reprove me not”), 51, (“O Lord, consider my distress”), 130, (“Lord, to thee I make my moan”), and 143, (“Lord, hear, my prayer, hark the plaint”). Among these settings, only the soprano melody used by Dowland for Psalm 51 comes from a known source, the Anglo-Genevan Psalter of 1556. While it is presumed that the other psalm settings were built on pre-existing melodies, their sources remain elusive.<sup>2</sup> Dowland’s other two psalm settings were originally published in Thomas East’s *The Whole Booke of Psalmes* of 1592. The tune used in the tenor of this setting of Psalm 130 first appeared in the 1539 publication of *Aulcuns pseaulmes et cantiques*. Psalm 38, “Put me not to rebuke, O Lord,” features a tune in the tenor first seen in the Scottish psalter of 1564.

I have also examined five examples of psalm settings that are not melancholy in nature. These pieces are the final test for my musical markers, for if a gesture appears in one of these, then it can no longer be associated with religious melancholy. Dowland composed two settings of Psalm 100 (“All people that on earth do dwell”), using the famous melody known as “The Old Hundredth” as the tenor for both. His setting of Psalm 104 (“My soul praise the Lord, speak good of his name”), also has its pre-existing melody in the tenor; this melody first appeared in the French-Genevan psalter of 1542. Psalm 134 (“Behold and have regard, ye servants of the Lord”), was

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<sup>2</sup> John Dowland, *Complete Psalms for S.A.T.B.* ed. Diana Poulton (London: Stainer and Bell, 1973).

composed using a pre-existing melody in the tenor that originally appeared in the French-Genevan Psalter of 1551. Finally, a piece called “A Prayer For the Queen’s Most Excellent Majesty” was based on a melody frequently associated with Psalm 146.<sup>3</sup>

I associate six distinct musical markers with religious melancholy in Dowland’s songs, and four of those will also be featured in the melancholy psalm settings and canticles. I use the term musical marker to mean a musical gesture that takes on significance through repeated use and mimetic qualities. I am indebted to the work of Susan Agrawal who first identified these markers as pertaining to melancholy primarily in the lute songs of Thomas Campion, although she did not associate them specifically with religious sentiment.<sup>4</sup> Agrawal associates fifteen distinct musical gestures with melancholy as seen in the lute songs of Campion, Dowland, Danyel, Jones, Rosseter, Cavendysh and others, as part of a much larger work devising a vocabulary of musical gestures as found in English lute song to characterize each of the four humors. I found that by isolating her characteristics of melancholy and by expanding her material focus to include all of Dowland’s lute songs, several of these gestures occurred with great frequency regardless of melancholic content, and some of the gestures did not apply to the work of Dowland at all. This caused me to question her identification of some of these markers as being indicative of melancholy in general, particularly as she frequently cites examples from Dowland to demonstrate characteristics of melancholy. Her work, however, does lead me to identify those gestures that may be specifically associated with religious melancholy.

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<sup>3</sup> Dowland, *Complete Psalms*, 15.

<sup>4</sup> Susan Rachel Agrawal, “‘Tune Thy Temper to These Sounds’: Music and Medicine in the English Ayre,” Ph.D. dissertation, Northwestern University, 2005.

The first gesture, or marker, is an idiomatic use of melismatic writing. I use the term melismatic writing to indicate instances of two to six pitches that are slurred over a single syllable. While I recognize that a melisma typically has more than a few notes, such figures do not appear in the music of John Dowland. In Dowland's practice, melismas emphasize specific words in the text. In the song "Then sit thee down," melismatic writing emphasizes the phrase "De profundis," which refers to Psalm 130 ("From out of the depths"), one of the Gradual Psalms chanted during Anglican Evensong services. In "When others sing *Venite*," melismatic writing set to the word "Amen" emulates the type of text setting found in Catholic plainchant, most often in the Gradual, Kyrie, Alleluia, Responsories, tracts and offertories, as seen in Example 3.1.

Example 3.1: "When others sing *Venite*" mm. 19–22



The melismas seen here on the word "Amen" are shorter and perhaps more disjunct than would appear in a typical example of plainchant, but the references are clear. In the later songs, Dowland's use of melismatic writing adds emphasis to melancholic words such as "pensive," "human," "sinfully," "weep," "sorrows," and "wounding," or redemptive words such as "Angels," "assuaged," "Christ," "redress," and "mercy." The fact that the same musical gesture can be used to express concepts of melancholy and ideas associated with spirituality demonstrates a connection in this music between conceptions of melancholy and religion, similar to the integration of these ideas expressed in the writings of Bright and Perkins.

Brief melismas in Dowland's psalms and canticles of religious melancholy highlight words pertaining to various religious states. Those that do not express melancholic themes tend to use this technique only very rarely, confirming my identification of melismas as a characteristic of religious melancholy. Words accented by melismas include "righteousness," "vengeance," "transgress," "dangers," "oppress," "Lord," "request," "prayer," "pleasure," "justified," "mercy," "lament," "crime," and "bloody." Again, the connection of melancholy and religion is made clear by the choice of words highlighted with these melismas. In the non-melancholy examples, no melismas appear in the pre-existing psalm or canticle melodies on which the pieces have been based, whereas there are examples of melismas in some of the original tunes for the melancholy songs. An example of this appears in Example 3.2.

Example 3.2: Tenor line, "Domine ne in furore" (Psalm 6), mm. 6–9



Susan Agrawal has associated descending lines, both chromatic and diatonic, with melancholy, and clearly, both of these melismas involve descending passages. In my survey of Dowland's lute songs, however, I found that eighty-seven of his eighty-eight songs contain descending lines, thus making them an unreliable marker of melancholy in Dowland's works. What this passage does demonstrate is the fear and despair that Perkins calls a temptation of trial, "A combate of the conscience directly

and immediately with the wrath of God.”<sup>5</sup> According to Perkins, this temptation causes the deepest kind of crisis of conscience. The sinner is so remorseful over the transgressive acts he has committed, that not only can he not forgive himself, but he is not ready to be forgiven by God either.

The second musical marker, a rest placed in the middle of the musical phrase, indicates a thought that is temporarily distracted or overcome by emotion. This can serve two functions. Such rests often appear near a word or phrase that is repeated for added emphasis or in front of emotionally-loaded words such as “sigh” or “weep.” This is a typical word-painting technique seen in “Time’s eldest son, Old Age,” or “If that a sinner’s sighs.” The rests can also work to halt a phrase temporarily, typically one that expresses a negative idea, such as “As for himself [rest], he hath no earthly motion,” as seen in Example 3.3.<sup>6</sup>

Example 3.3: “Time’s eldest son, Old Age” mm. 11–14



Aristotle describes the effect of rests on the listener in terms of spoken rhetoric, “For a small clause often makes the listener stumble...he is tripped by the break, he comes

<sup>5</sup> William Perkins, *His Pioneer Works on Casuistry: “A Discourse on Conscience” and “A Whole Treatise on Cases of Conscience,”* ed. Thomas F. Merrill (Nieuwkoop: B. De Graaf, 1966), 119.

<sup>6</sup> Mauro Calcagno refers to instances of “pointing words” such as “himself” as serving a deictic purpose in the madrigals and operas of Monteverdi. See: Mauro Calcagno, “Imitar col canto chi parla’: Monteverdi and the Creation of a Language For Musical Theatre,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 55, 3 (Autumn, 2002), 383–431. In contrast to Monteverdi, Dowland’s treatment of deictic words is inconsistent.

a cropper, as it were, by the interruption.”<sup>7</sup> The effect is the same in music; the listener’s attention is drawn to the moment of silence and the sounds that surround it, laying additional emphasis on the words that precede and follow the rest.

Rests that occur within phrases point to the importance of the words that precede them in the melancholy psalm- and canticle-based songs, providing the listener with a moment to reflect on the text’s meaning. In contrast, this type of gesture does not appear in the non-melancholic settings, confirming its inclusion into my collection of gestures of religious melancholy. Examples of these rests can be found in lines such as “I must confess [rest] how that continually [rest] thy laws I do transgress,” as seen in “The Humble Complaint of a Sinner,” (Example 4) and “Hear now, O Lord, my request [rest] for it is full due time,” from “De Profundis” (Psalm 130).

Example 3.4: “The Humble Complaint of a Sinner” mm. 11–15

The image shows a musical score for four voices (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass) in 2/2 time. The lyrics are: "I must con-fess how that con-tin-u-al-ly thy laws I". The score is divided into four staves, each corresponding to a voice part. The lyrics are written below each staff. The music features a prominent rest after "con-fess" and another after "con-tin-u-al-ly" in each part, emphasizing these words.

<sup>7</sup> Aristotle, *The Art of Rhetoric*, trans. H. C. Lawson-Tancred (London and New York: Penguin Books, 1991), 232.

The pre-existing melody for this canticle, which was first printed in the 1562 psalter, appears in the treble and includes rests on the same beats that occur in Dowland's composed lines, following the words "confess" and "continually." Since the rests occur simultaneously in all four voices, the breaks are emphasized and the listeners' attention is drawn to the words that precede the breaks. Further emphasis on these words stems from the length of the half-notes on the final syllables of each of these two words. This technique accents the words "confess" and "continually" of the statement "I must *confess* how that *continually* thy laws I do transgress," an expression that tells of a crisis of conscience, further demonstrating the presence of religious melancholy in this music.

My third marker is chromatic writing and dissonance. Chromaticism and dissonance occur to some degree in virtually all of Dowland's lute songs, but in his later songs of religious melancholy, they occur with great frequency, consistency, and in significant places. The use of chromatic inflection to create dissonance colors adjectives and adverbs, such as "human troubles," "weep bitterly," "every wrong," and "dying song," and other fragments of text, such as "when his sorrows," "worlds of woes," "in his griefs," and "misery and pain." More often than not, the use of this inflection and dissonance, adds emphasis to a negative idea. This, of course, can be viewed as the same sort of text painting being practiced by Monteverdi and others during the *seconda pratica* in Italy at around the same time. Several instances of Dowland's chromatic inflection appear in Example 3.5.



worlds of woes, of woes did com-pass, com - pass him a - bout, a - bout.

Dissonance and chromaticism can be seen and heard in both the melancholic and non-melancholic settings of psalms and canticles, but as they occur with much more frequency and consistency in the melancholic works, they continue to function as indicators of religious melancholy. Some of the non-melancholic settings, such as “A Prayer For the Queens’ Most Excellent Majesty,” Psalm 134 (“Behold and have regard, ye servants of the Lord”), and Psalm 100 (“All people that on earth do dwell”) feature very little dissonance, while others, such as Dowland’s setting of Psalm 104 (“My soul praise the Lord, speak good of his name”), have somewhat more. Much more extensive use of dissonance appears in the melancholy settings, and often is used to highlight words with a particularly negative meaning, such as “sinful,” “vengeance,” “desert,” “oppress,” “sorrows,” “wrath,” “judgment,” and “lamenting.” In these instances, just as in the lute song examples, the ideas expressed are not only melancholy in nature, but speak to the connection between melancholy and religion. An example of chromatic inflection and dissonance appears in Example 3.6.

Example 3.6: “The Humble Complaint of a Sinner” mm. 5–8

The musical score consists of four staves, each with a different vocal line. The lyrics are written below the notes. The first staff (Soprano) has the lyrics: "In wrath thou should'st me pay ven - geance for my de - sert". The second staff (Alto) has the lyrics: "In wrath thou - - - should'st me pay ven - geance for my de - sert". The third staff (Tenor) has the lyrics: "In wrath thou should'st me pay ven - geance for my de - sert". The fourth staff (Bass) has the lyrics: "In wrath thou should'st me pay ven - geance for my de - sert". The music is in 3/4 time and features chromatic inflection in the soprano line.

This example is one of the few not only to feature chromatic inflection in the pre-existing melody, the soprano, but also to harmonize that melody with a number of chromatic notes and several instances of dissonance. The text claims that God has not been harsh enough in His punishment for the sins that have been committed by the speaker, another reference to Perkins’ temptation of trial.

The fourth marker, repetition of text, whether it be words of melancholy or terms of solace, features prominently in Dowland’s later songs of religious melancholy. In the song “When David’s life,” the phrase “And worlds of woes, worlds of woes, of woes did compass, compass him about, about,” gives the impression of hesitation or confusion; the words and the music seem to be unsure what to do next, much as one would feel when surrounded on every side by sorrow, with nowhere to turn. This phrase can be seen in Example 3.5 on page 27. Of course, repetition can also serve to emphasize an important idea. This use of the technique tends to appear more frequently toward the end of a song, in keeping with Aristotle’s

advice stating, “For in order to be clearly understood they [previous writers on rhetoric] urge frequent repetition...And it is appropriate to do this at the end, not, as some say, in the introduction.”<sup>8</sup> Dowland’s text repetitions tend to follow this pattern. If they occur toward the beginning of a song, they express confusion and doubt, but if they appear toward the end of a song, it is typically for emphasis of an important idea.

Because the psalms and canticles are all based on pre-existing melodies, the fact that there is little text repetition in any of them is unremarkable. The sole instance of repetition in all of this literature occurs in the final line of “The Humble Complaint of a Sinner,” with the repetition of the line “thy laws I do transgress,” as seen in Example 3.7.

Example 3.7: “The Humble Complaint of a Sinner” mm. 15–18

The image displays a musical score for four staves, likely representing different vocal parts. Each staff contains a melodic line with lyrics underneath. The lyrics are: "Thy laws I do trans-gress," followed by a comma and then "Thy laws I do trans-gress." This line is repeated across all four staves. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and bar lines, indicating a specific musical setting of the text.

The repetition of this particular line reflects perfectly the conception of religious melancholy as viewed by Dowland’s contemporaries, Bright and Perkins, as a disturbance resulting from dwelling on sin and a failure to make atonement.

<sup>8</sup> Aristotle, *Art of Rhetoric*, 261.

The final two gestures I have encountered are less firmly associated with Dowland's expressions of religious melancholy than the first four. They are more closely identified with Dowland's settings of religious texts, with or without a melancholic temperament. The fifth gesture is long notes which last half a measure or more and are placed at the beginning or in the middle of musical phrase, slowing both the forward motion of the line and the meaning of the text. This marker is evident in all of Dowland's lute songs of religious melancholy and is used to accent negative words such as "sighs," "tears," "vows," "prayers," "troubles," "darkness," "plaints," "sorrows," and "woes," and words of hope such as "Lord," "right," "patience," and "help." Several examples of this occur in Example 3.8.

Example 3.8: "Time's eldest son, Old Age" mm. 15–19



Note in this example how each word that portrays an aspect of religious melancholy is given two or more beats, as opposed to the other words which only hold one beat. Again, the use of this technique for both words of sorrow and words of redemption, even in the same line of text ("sighs, tears, vows and prayers") strengthens the connection between religion and melancholy appearing in these songs.

This marker appears in both melancholy and non-melancholy psalm settings and canticles, and I therefore, take this to mean that long notes are simply a characteristic of the religious music of Dowland, but not necessarily that which expresses religious melancholy. This more generalized employment of long notes may be seen in Example 3.9.

Example 3.9: “Lamentatio Henrici Noel” mm. 1–3

The image shows a musical score for four voices (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass) in 2/2 time, with a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The lyrics for all parts are: "O Lord turn not a - way thy face". The Soprano part begins with a long note on the word "a -". The Alto part begins with a quarter note on "O". The Tenor part begins with a long note on "a -". The Bass part begins with a long note on "O".

The soprano melody in this piece was taken from the 1562 English Metrical Psalter from Cantic 8, “The Lamentation of a Sinner.” Dowland’s version varies from the original source in that the quarter note under the second syllable of the word “away” was originally a dotted half note.<sup>9</sup> While Dowland’s modification robs the example of another long note, the extension would not have appeared toward the beginning or end of the phrase, as is idiomatic of Dowland’s psalms and canticles.

We have seen that these long notes appear in lute songs of religious melancholy, but are not exclusive to this category, as they appear in both melancholy and non-melancholy examples of Dowland’s religious music. In order to determine whether this is simply a characteristic of all of Dowland’s music, I have also looked for these long notes in examples of melancholy lute songs that are not religious in nature.

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<sup>9</sup> Robert Illing, *The English Metrical Psalter 1562: A Catalogue of the Early Editions, An Index of Their Contents, and a Comparative Study of Their Melodies*, v. II *Transcriptions* (Adelaide, 1983), 17–18.

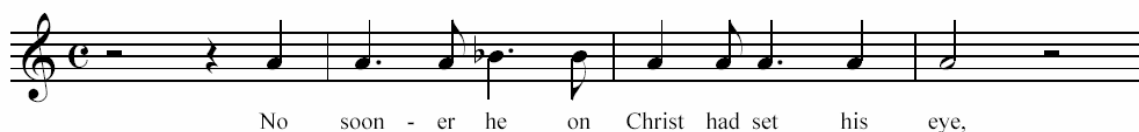
There are twelve examples of non-religious melancholy lute songs which do not include any instances of notes lasting half a measure or more. These include songs such as “Unquiet thoughts” and “Wilt thou unkind thus reave me?”<sup>10</sup> The remaining melancholy lute songs, whether they be songs of pure melancholy, erotic melancholy or melancholy related to thwarted ambition, do contain this marker, but not in nearly the same quantities seen in the lute songs of religious melancholy. This implies that to some degree, long notes within a phrase are idiomatic to all of Dowland’s music, but there is a significance to their appearance within religious contexts. I believe these long notes offer this music a pensive quality, giving the listener a moment to think, that would be appropriate in any song with a serious subject matter.

Finally, groups of repeated pitches over several syllables of text recreate the sound of a Catholic psalm tone in Dowland’s later songs of religious melancholy. This marker first appears in “When others sing *Venite*,” setting the opening phrase, which is then contrasted with a melodic phrase “Stand by and turn to *Noli aemulari*.” The first half of the statement “For *Quare fremuerunt* use *Oremus*” is intoned on an F#, while the second half is not, portraying Catholic references differently than Anglican ones. In the later songs, numerous types of phrases are set in this manner. Some serve as prayer, such as “Listen to patience” and “Songs to the Lord,” some tell biblical stories such as “When David’s life by Saul was often sought” and “When the poor cripple by the pool did lie,” others speak of hardship, such as “Where sin sore wounding” and “daily doth oppress me,” and others bring positive change, such as

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<sup>10</sup> Both songs listed appear in Dowland’s *First Booke of Songs and Ayres*, but examples of this type appear in all four of Dowland’s song books.

Example 3.10: “When the poor cripple” mm. 9–12



As might be expected, emulation of psalm tones within the psalms and canticles, regardless of melancholic content, is common. In the three canticles set by Dowland, the pre-existing tunes include either no instances or very few instances of these repeated pitches, all occurrences of the gesture being newly composed by Dowland in the lower lines of the texture. The psalm settings appear in two varieties. Some, such as Dowland's settings of Psalms 130 and 134 and "A Prayer for the Queen's Most Excellent Majesty," are much like the canticles set by Dowland, featuring few instances of repeated pitches in the pre-existing melodies. In these three psalms, the composed instances of repeated pitches are scattered throughout the lower voices. In the remaining psalm settings, instances of repeated pitches do appear in the pre-existing melody. When this occurs, the moment is highlighted by similar settings in all of the voices, creating not only an emulation of the psalm-tone gesture melodically, but also by use of homophonic texture, as seen in the top three voices of Example 3.11.

Example 3.11: “Miserere Mei Deus (Psalm 51)” mm. 14–18

My sins de - face my faults re - dress

My sins de - face my faults re - dress

My sins de - face my faults re - dress

My sins de - face my faults re - - - dress

The intonation in the first two measures in this example makes the appearance of the diminished seventh chord on the first beat of the third measure all the more dramatic. This marker occurs with equal frequency in psalm settings that express melancholic and non-melancholic themes, which leads me to the conclusion that these repeated pitches are more characteristic of Dowland’s religious music in general than that specifically associated with melancholy.

As with the long-note examples, I have looked for this gesture in non-religious melancholy lute songs to measure its applicability. Eleven examples appear in Dowland’s published lute songs of melancholy, regardless of type, that feature no instances of these repeated pitches. These include some of Dowland’s most famous works of melancholy such as “Flow my tears,” “If my complaints could passions move,” “Go crystal tears” and “Woeful heart.” While instances of repeated pitches do appear in the remaining examples of Dowland’s songs of pure melancholy, erotic



melancholy and ambitious melancholy, these instances do not occur with the frequency or consistency in which they appear in the songs of religious melancholy.

Perhaps the best way to establish the musical characteristics of this specific category of Dowland's music of religious melancholy is to compare them to the compositional technique of a purely melancholic song. With that in mind, I will look closely at Dowland's "Flow not so fast ye fountains" and compare it musically to what is, perhaps, the finest example of Dowland's religious melancholy, "In the trembling shadow." The text of "Flow not so fast" finds the protagonist urging his eyes not to waste too much time and energy crying, for "true grief will still remain." In both songs, Dowland shifts between duple meter and triple meter, creating a fluid, flexible rhythm.

One significant difference between the songs lies in the lute part. "Trembling shadow" begins with a two-and-one-half bar introduction and includes brief instrumental interludes throughout the song. In "Flow not so fast," the singer begins on the first beat and only pauses for brief moments for breath. The accompaniment is far more active in "Trembling shadow" as well. Ornamental figures in the lute part of "Flow not so fast" tend to appear during long-held notes in the vocal line. This is not always so in "Trembling shadow," which features its most complex lute writing under the line "Far from human troubles placed." Also absent from "Flow not so fast" are the melismas and rests within phrases that were so prevalent in Dowland's songs of religious melancholy. The most striking difference between the two songs is the pitch center. Each song is written with two flats, but while "Flow not so fast" stays obediently in the area we would call G minor, that same pitch family is

destabilized in “Trembling shadow” by the second note, an E natural, in the lute, and a B natural in the first phrase of the vocal line. This creates an ambiguity in pitch space and sets an atmosphere of uncertainty, which I associate with a state of spiritual crisis.

I have identified in Dowland’s lute songs and devotional settings four musical characteristics that can be specifically associated with the conception of religious melancholy. While these particular musical gestures appear among fifteen first identified by Susan Agrawal as being indicative of general melancholy in the lute songs of Thomas Campion and others, in the works of Dowland, they function differently. Not only do they signify melancholy, but melancholy as it relates to religious guilt and suffering. Dowland’s treatment of musical gestures such as melismas, rests within phrases, chromaticism and dissonance, and text repetition demonstrates an attitude similar to that expressed in the writings of Bright and Perkins and in conflict with the ideas espoused by Burton.

## Chapter 4

### The Music of William Byrd, Henry Lawes, William Lawes and John Hilton

In order to contextualize the works of Dowland, it is necessary to examine similar religious works by composers working both before and after him. To that aim, I have studied five religious songs and psalm settings by William Byrd composed in 1588 and five songs on religious themes by various composers writing between 1630 and 1640. The purpose of this expansion of my study is to determine whether the musical characteristics found to be indicative of religious melancholy in Dowland's songs are unique to his own musical style or represent a broader trend in religious music of this time. I also seek to study how these characteristics may have changed over the course of time and how they may reflect the changes demonstrated in the treatises of Bright, Perkins and Burton with regard to religious tolerance.

The religious works of Byrd that I have chosen fall into the same categories as those of Dowland. Three are psalm settings: "O God give ear and do apply" (Psalm 55), "My soul opprest with care and grief" (Psalm 119), "How shall a young man prone to ill" (also from Psalm 119); and two are "Songs of Sadness and Piety": "Prostrate O Lord" and "If that a sinner's sighs." All of these songs appear in Byrd's 1588 collection *Psalmes, Sonets, and Songs*, and all were originally written as consort songs for voice and four lutes but also published for five voices with the top voice identified as "first singing voice." In these works, I have identified the same musical

markers that are present in the lute songs and psalm settings of Dowland such as long notes lasting over half a measure, short melismas of between two and eleven pitches, rests that interrupt a phrase of text, repeated textual passages, repeated pitches and brief moments of dissonance and chromaticism.

Byrd's long notes tend to occur on words at the ends of phrases. The instance of long notes occurring within phrases, which is more rare, and therefore statistically more interesting, does not seem to carry the same textual importance as was noted in the religious songs of Dowland. Accented words such as "when," "and," "have," "with," "to," "do," "of," "how," and "but" would seem to indicate a different style of text setting than Dowland's music demonstrates. This implies that in Byrd's music, the lengthening of a note does not necessarily indicate textual significance. There are fewer instances of mid-phrase words set to long notes that do carry importance from a perspective of religious melancholy. These include words such as "cries," "oppress," "grief," "pain," "Lord," "frailty," "sad," "mourning," "sacrifice," "sinner's," "wept," and "bitterly." In Example 4.1, note the long notes on "sighs" in the soprano and bass lines and on "sinners" in the alto.

Example 4.1: “If that a sinner’s sighs”- William Byrd mm. 1–2

The image shows a musical score for five voices: Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass, and a fifth voice (likely a second Alto or Soprano). The music is in common time (C) and G major. The lyrics are: "If that a sin - ner's sighs,". The Soprano line has a melisma on the word "a" that crosses the bar line. The Alto line has a melisma on the word "sin" that crosses the bar line. The Tenor line has a melisma on the word "ner's" that crosses the bar line. The Bass line has a melisma on the word "sighs" that crosses the bar line. The fifth voice line has a melisma on the word "sin" that crosses the bar line.

Byrd also lengthens the word “a” in the alto line across the bar line, demonstrating this different approach to text setting.

Byrd’s melismatic writing differs from that of Dowland in that while both composers tend to use very short melismatic passages consisting of only two to four notes, Byrd’s works also use somewhat longer melismas. The longest of these stretches to eleven pitches and occurs on the word “mourning” in “Prostrate O Lord,” as seen in the tenor line in Example 4.2.

Example 4.2: “Prostrate O Lord” – William Byrd mm. 21–23

Example 4.2 shows a musical score for five voices (Soprano, Alto, Tenor 1, Tenor 2, and Bass) in measures 21–23 of “Prostrate O Lord” by William Byrd. The lyrics are: “cry, my sad and mourn - ing dit - - - ty”. The Soprano line has a rest in the middle of the phrase. The Alto line has a rest in the middle of the phrase. The Tenor 1 line has a rest in the middle of the phrase. The Tenor 2 line has a rest in the middle of the phrase. The Bass line has a rest in the middle of the phrase.

A much shorter melisma of only two notes appears in the same syllable in the soprano and bass lines as well.

Rests appearing in the middle of text phrases interrupt the idea being presented. This occurs in the opening phrase of Byrd’s “O God give ear and do apply” between the words “ear” and “and” and again in the phrases “Because my foes with threats [rest] and cries, oppress me through despite” and “For they in council do conspire [rest] to charge me with some ill.” They appear in “My Soul opprest with care and grief” in the line “My ways unto thee [rest] have I shew’d.” “How shall a young man prone to ill” separates the lines “If that thy law O Lord he do [rest] all frailty set apart” and “Embrace with settled mind, and learn [rest] thy word with care to keep.” In “If that a sinner’s sighs,” rests occur in the lines “Or repentant tears be [rest] Angel’s wine,” “That went with Peter forth [rest] most sinfully,” and “But not [rest] with Peter wept most bitterly.” From a word painting perspective, “Prostrate O

Lord,” is Byrd’s most creative use of rests in these religious songs, inserting two rests into the line “Stop not thine ears [rest, creating the silence of stopped ears] against my cry, my sad and [rest] mourning ditty,” as in example 4.3.

Example 4.3: “Prostrate, O Lord” – William Byrd mm. 18–21

The musical score for Example 4.3, "Prostrate, O Lord" by William Byrd, measures 18–21, is presented for five voices: Soprano, Alto, Tenor 1, Tenor 2, and Bass. The music is in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. The lyrics are: "stop not thine ears a - gainst my cry, ears a - gainst my cry, a - gainst my cry, my cry, a - gainst my cry, a - gainst my cry, my ears a - gainst my cry my sad and mourn - a - gainst my cry, my sad and mourn - ing". The score illustrates a complex setting with many rests, particularly in the Soprano and Tenor 1 parts, creating a sense of silence or "stopped ears".

The repetition of text is approached differently in Byrd’s work than in that of Dowland. Byrd’s psalm settings, for example, include repetitions of lines of text whereas Dowland’s do not. As both composers are setting pre-existing psalm melodies, this might at first seem unusual; Byrd’s work, however, features a much more liberal treatment of his source materials than Dowland’s, altering pitches and rhythms with much more freedom than Dowland. In contrast to the psalm settings, both composers repeat lines of text in their religious songs. Repeated phrases allow voices which move in faster rhythms to sing the same text at the same time as voices that move in slower rhythms and, thus, can not cover as many words. In the case of Byrd, repetition does not seem to indicated that the words or phrases hold particular

importance to the meaning of the psalm or song, and the amount of repeated text varies from a single word, as in the line, “With complaints I pray full sore opprest, opprest,” found in the bass line of “O God give ear and do apply” (mm. 20–23), to entire phrases, such as “Teach me thy law and so I shall be eased of my pain, be eased of my pain, of my pain. Teach me thy law and so I shall be eased of my pain, be eased of my pain, be eased of my pain,” as seen in the soprano line of “My soul opprest with care and grief” (mm. 25–41).

Just as in the religious songs of Dowland, Byrd’s use of pitches that are repeated successively three or more times in one voice is reminiscent of psalm tones. In this music, it is particularly notable when it happens in the soprano or highest sounding voice rather than a middle or bass voice. This occurs numerous times in “O God give ear and do apply,” setting the words “O God give ear,” “I call and cry,” “grant my request,” “because my foes,” “and so the wicked,” and “for they in council” (Ex. 4.4). It also occurs once each in the songs “My soul opprest with cares and grief” and “Prostrate O Lord,” to the texts “doth cleave unto the dust” and “stop not thine ears.”



Example 4.4: “O God Give Ear and Do Apply” – William Byrd mm. 1–4

O God give ear and do ap - ply, to hear me

O God give ear and do ap - ply, to hear me

O God give ear and do ap - ply, to hear me

O God give ear and do ap - ply, to hear

O God give ear and do ap - ply, to

Finally, I compare Byrd’s treatment of dissonance and chromaticism in textually relevant passages to that of Dowland. Byrd’s music shows a tendency to place several dissonances close together over words that describe pain and sadness in several places. Examples include several sevenths and a tritone during the phrase “his unbridled heart” in “How shall a young man prone to ill,” and more sevenths and a tritone during the statement “most sinfully” in “If that a sinner’s sighs.” The same intervals accompany the phrase “with plaints I pray full sore opprest” in “O God give ear and do apply,” and several seconds and sevenths appear with “against my cry, my sad and mourning ditty” in “Prostrate O Lord.” See musical example 4.2 on page 40 for this passage. In addition, the F# on the word “and” in the tenor line and the melisma set to the word “mourning” create several passing dissonances, particularly with the lower voices.

In contrast to the work of William Byrd, I have examined the work of three composers from the 1630s and 40s to determine if their approaches to issues of religion and religious melancholy differ from that of Dowland. These composers are Henry Lawes (1596–1662), with his songs “When thou, poor excommunicate,” “How long shall I a martyr be?” and “No, no, fair heretic;” his brother, William Lawes (1602–1645), who also set “No, no fair heretic;” and John Hilton (1599–1657), with “Wilt thou forgive the sin where I begun?” These composers have been chosen specifically for their position in time, writing their songs after the publication of Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy* in 1621, and prior to the English Civil Wars (1642–1651), during which time religious tolerance in England was at its lowest ebb.

The music of the three composers will be considered separately, as it would be unwise to conclude that simply because the men were contemporaries that their musical styles were identical. I will begin with the most prolific song writer, Henry Lawes. His choice of song texts is noteworthy in that while the titles of his songs seem to indicate religious fervor (“How long shall I a martyr be?” “When thou, poor excommunicate,” and “No, no, fair heretic”), all three songs actually speak of love gone wrong. Lawes wrote religious music during his career at the Chapel Royal, but it was for specific liturgical use, and does not express melancholy themes. His use of religious terminology occurs instead in his secular music and thereby speaks to the changing attitudes toward religion in England. Lawes’ songs of religious melancholy contrast dramatically with the treatment of religious subjects by Dowland and Byrd.

Example 4.5: “How Long Shall I a Martyr Be?” – Henry Lawes

How long shall I a martyr be  
To love and Woman’s cruelty?

Or why doth sullen fate confine  
My heart to one that is not mine:  
Had I 'ere lov'd as others do,  
But only for an hour or two,  
Then there had store of reason bin  
Why I should suffer for my sin.

Example 4.6: “When Thou, Poor Excommunicate” – Henry Lawes

When thou, poor excommunicate  
From all the joys of love,  
Shalt see the full reward and glorious fate  
Which my strong faith hath purchas'd me,  
Then curse thine own inconstancy.  
For thou shalt weep, entreat, complain  
To love, as I did once to thee;  
When all thy tears shall be as vain  
As mine were then, for thou shalt be  
Damn'd for thy apostasy.

Example 4.7: “No, No, Fair Heretick” – Henry Lawes

No, no, fair heretick, it cannot be,  
But an ill love in mee,  
And worse for thee;  
For were it in my pow'r  
To love thee now this hour,  
More than I did the last,  
T'would then so fall,  
I might not love at all:  
Love that can flow,  
And can admit encrease,  
Admits as well an ebb,  
And may grow lesse.

Henry Lawes' mid-phrase long notes do not occur with nearly the same frequency as is seen in the music of Dowland and Byrd, but when they do occur, the word being accented is typically important to the meaning of the text. Examples include “poor,” “reward,” “glorious,” “weep,” “entreat,” “tears,” “damned,” “one,”

and “admits.” The phrase found in Example 4.8 is particularly drawn out by these long notes.

Example 4.8: “How Long Shall I a Martyr Be?”- Henry Lawes, mm. 14–17

The image displays two systems of musical notation for a song by Henry Lawes. Each system consists of a treble and a bass staff, both in 12/4 time and featuring a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The lyrics are written below the notes. The first system covers measures 14 to 15, and the second system covers measures 16 to 17. The lyrics are: "Then there had store of rea - son" and "bin why I should suf - fer for my sin."

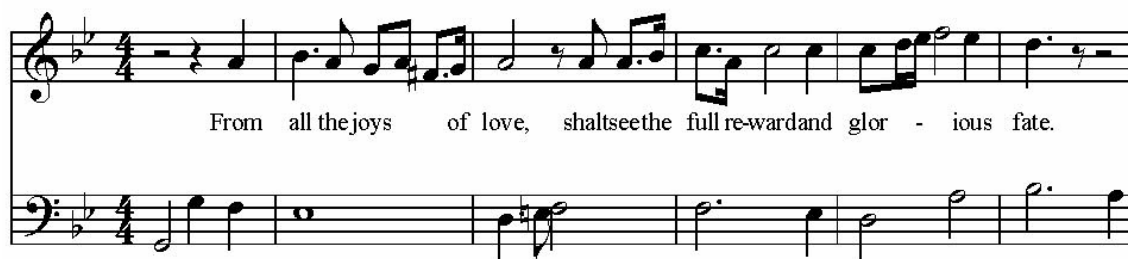
Then there had store of rea - son

bin why I should suf - fer for my sin.

Interestingly, the text of this particular phrase embodies ideas embodied in William Perkins’ temptation of trial. In the context of a broken love affair, however, this religious effect is somehow lost.

Melismas such as those seen in Dowland’s and Byrd’s songs are rare in Lawes’ songs as well; they also tend to be short, more in line with those of Dowland. The three songs examined featured a total of eight such melismas, the longest encompassing only four notes. Like Dowland’s, Lawes’ melismas accentuate meaningful words, such as “joys,” “glorious,” “complain,” “woman’s,” “cruelty,” “fair,” and “grow.” Lawes includes two such melismas in Example 4.9.

Example 4.9: “When Thou, Poor Excommunicate” – Henry Lawes mm. 3–8



Whereas in the music of Dowland and Byrd the words “joy” and “glorious” would have been used to describe devotion to God, in this poem, they describe love.

The technique of inserting a rest into the middle of a text phrase occurs only once in the three songs of Henry Lawes that I have examined. It is found in “When thou, poor excommunicate” in the phrase “When all thy tears [rest] shall be as vain,” as seen in Example 4.10.

Example 4.10: “When Thou, Poor Excommunicate” – Henry Lawes mm. 17–19



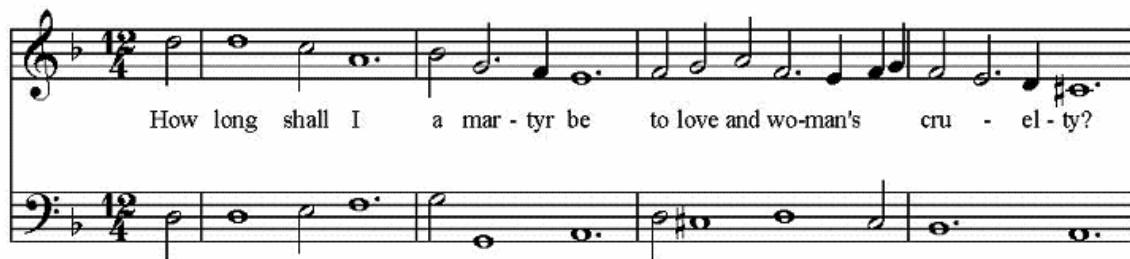
This rest emphasizes the word “tears,” but as an expression of a lover’s response to betrayal, the effect is radically different from that heard in the music of religious melancholy by Dowland

Given the frequency with which the songs of Dowland and Byrd feature repeated sections of text, it is surprising that this technique does not occur at all in the songs of Henry Lawes, nor in those of either of his contemporaries. Brief passages

that repeat a pitch three times or more do however, occasionally occur. Unlike his predecessors, Lawes' employs this device as a tool to connect one phrase to the next, rather than to emulate the sound of chant, as I have hypothesized for the music of Dowland. Nearly every example of this gesture in Lawes' music features the ending pitch from one phrase and the beginning of the next. See example 4.9 on page 47 for an example of this technique.

The use of dissonance as a form of text painting is also present in the music of Lawes. The most common dissonances occur when a long note in the bass line clashes with moving notes in the vocal line. Words that express positive and negative emotions are highlighted in this way, such as "joys," "glorious," "inconstancy," "love," "apostasy," "martyr," "cruelty," "sullen," and "worse." Such moments of dissonance occur on the words "love" and "cruelty" in Example 4.11.

Example 4.11: "How Long Shall I a Martyr Be?" – Henry Lawes mm. 1–5



In the second syllable of the word "martyr," the voice descends to an f, creating a passing minor seventh with the g in the continuo line. The word "love" occurs on a tritone with a g in the voice and a c# in the bass. The second syllable of "woman's" features a major ninth between the e in the voice and the d in the continuo. Finally, "cruelty" is expressed with a tritone between the e in the voice and a b flat in the continuo part.

As William Lawes' music was only available in manuscript during his lifetime, and not published until after his death at the Siege of Chester, the exact dates of composition are unknown. It is believed however, that his setting of "No, no, fair heretic" was composed around 1638. The text was written by John Suckling, and differs slightly from that set by his older brother; the first line becoming "No, no fair heretic, *it needs must be*," in William's setting. In addition to love songs like this, William Lawes also wrote songs of religious devotion. His anthems, however, much like his brother's liturgical works do not entertain melancholy themes, and I have elected, therefore, not to discuss them here.

In "No, no fair heretic," the only note that is longer than half of one measure which does not appear at the end of a phrase, is the first note, a half note on the word "No." Mid-phrase rests and text repetitions do not appear at all in this work. Three brief melismas appear in the final two phrases of the song. They appear in example 4.12.

Example 4.12: “No, No Fair Heretic” – William Lawes mm. 14–19

Love that can flow, and can ad - mit in - crease, Ad -

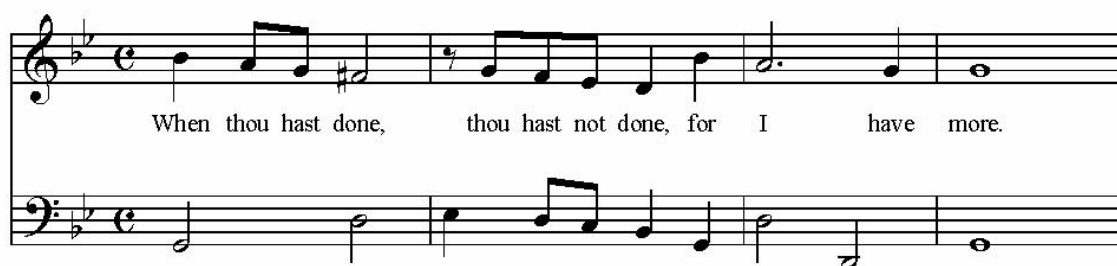
mits as well an ebb, and may grow less.

There is little religious, melancholic or amorous significance to the words highlighted with these brief melismas, “admit,” “and” and “grow.” The technique of pitch repetition to connect phrases, as seen in the songs of Henry Lawes, appears in this song as well, in four distinct places. See for example, mm. 16–17 above. Finally, dissonance is used to accent words such as “heretic,” “worse,” and “admits.”

Very few of the musical characteristics of religious melancholy seen in the music of Dowland, Byrd and the Lawes brothers are present in “Wilt thou forgive the sin where I begun?” by John Hilton. Despite featuring a text that expresses penitential notions of religious melancholy similar to those set by Dowland and Byrd, the only musical characteristics of religious melancholy that appear in Hilton’s song are two mid-phrase long notes, on the words “I” and “done,” together with several instances of dissonance, which consistently occur on the word “thou,” each time it is stated except the last. Both techniques appear in Example 4.13.



Example 4.13: “Wilt thou forgive the sin where I begun?” – John Hilton mm. 13–16



The text of “Wilt thou forgive the sin where I begun?” was written in 1623 by John Donne, a descendent on his mother’s side of Thomas More and other religious dissidents. Donne was ordained in the Church of England, but this text does bear the mark of moralist tendencies such as those found in the teachings of the Puritans and Calvinists. Peter LeHuray and Ian Spink have speculated that Donne himself commissioned Hilton’s setting of the poem, also known as “The Hymn to God the Father.”<sup>1</sup>

Given the similarities between the music of William Byrd and John Dowland, and the differences heard in that of Henry Lawes, it is tempting to assume that these differences are simply the result of changing tastes over the course of time. But I believe there is something more at work here. One major difference in the music stems from the composers’ differing approaches to religion in the texts. As societal values changed from the more tolerant views seen in texts such as those by Bright and Perkins to more parochial attitudes espoused by Burton, it is natural that the musical expression of these values would change as well. The texts set by the Lawes brothers approach religion very differently from those examined by earlier composers. The text set by John Hilton, however, while more in line with Dowland and Byrd’s

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<sup>1</sup> Peter LeHuray and Ian Spink, “John Hilton (ii),” *Grove Music Online*, ed. L. Macy (Retrieved 3/13/07), <http://www.grovemusiconline.libproxy.lib.unc.edu> .

conception of religious melancholy, yet deals with a complaint that is quite different from that expressed during Dowland's time. Hilton's approach to religious melancholy is one that demonstrates a lack of tolerance to religious difference. This complaint reflects a new view of religion and its effects on the emotions that is shared by authors like Robert Burton.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusion

Comparing the music of religious melancholy by Dowland and Byrd to that of later composers such as the Lawes brothers and John Hilton reveals a shift in the conception of melancholy and religion that occurred sometime between the composition of Dowland's last works in the 1610s and the 1630s. One of the most significant events to take place during that period is the publication of Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy* in 1621. While it is tempting to assume that Burton's book was solely responsible for the changes we see reflected in the music, I believe that Burton's book was not so much a catalyst for change as it was a symptom of the changes occurring in England at the time. The reign of James I had been fraught with tensions brought on by the demands of religious leaders and by the Thirty Years War, which had erupted on the continent. Religious tolerance was a luxury the government could not afford. Burton's book and its anti-Puritanical bias conformed with the crown's agenda.

The earlier writings of Timothy Bright and William Perkins reflect a more optimistic time, which is reflected in the music of Dowland. Both theorists lived during the reign of Elizabeth I, a ruler who was reasonably tolerant of the new moralist religions of Puritanism and Calvinism. While these moralist religions stressed a difficult path to salvation, the openness the Puritans and Calvinists faced during the late sixteenth century made their practice much easier. This is evident in

how widely aspects of the religious practices of the Calvinists and Puritans began to spread throughout England, even impacting the compositional practices and text choices of Catholics like John Dowland and William Byrd. This is evident in the number of texts they set based on emotional hardship stemming from sin and guilt.

The most important implication of this study is that Dowland's work must be examined in light of its associations with melancholy and in reference to the earlier writers Bright and Perkins rather than Burton. While Burton's work is by far more comprehensive than that of Bright or Perkins, changes in views of religious toleration and therefore religious melancholy between the first and second quarters of the century are too significant to support continued comparisons of Dowland and Burton. Interpretation of Dowland's music of religious melancholy within the context of Bright and Perkins yields better and more substantive results. Continued study is complicated by the fact that Bright's treatise is available only in facsimile. A modern critical edition would be of enormous help to the field. I also believe that it is vital that similar work be done on Dowland's other melancholic works: those that are purely melancholy, those that exhibit erotic melancholy (in addition to the studies already completed by Linda Phyllis Austern), and those pieces that demonstrate the melancholy of thwarted ambition, to see if a similar shift in conception has occurred.

While Dowland has remained the figure most often associated with musical expressions of melancholy in England during this time, he is certainly not the only composer to entertain these themes in his music. Further investigation into other contemporary composers and of other genres such as anthems, madrigals and court

masques will surely offer additional insight into the phenomenon of religious melancholy and its expression in music.

Dowland's music of religious melancholy is both beautiful and haunting; it offers us an intriguing glimpse of a society that would soon be torn apart by religious dissention and conflict. His music is that of the calm before the storm. But even within that calm, there is a darker sense, a foreboding sadness. Somehow Dowland and those around him seemed to sense that troubling times were ahead, times of war and religious oppression. That this premonition should lend itself to feelings of melancholy is not surprising. It is the expressions of this melancholy that we have been left to enjoy and question and study. And we are the better for it.

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