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Diane Kelsey McColley
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Introduction

This book is about the musical experience of seventeenth-century poets and ways it gets into their poems. It is addressed primarily to readers of poetry, but I hope that musicians, and especially choir members, interested in relations between words and music will also be interested in what a literary interpreter has to say about them.

Even though their era is regarded as the golden age of English Church music, little has been written about connections between poetry and the work of composers such as Byrd, Gibbons, Weelkes, and Amner, who provided the music of college chapels and cathedral churches and were included in books of madrigals, songs, and psalms that poets are likely to have used. Because others have dealt with solo song and the music of court and theatre, my own contribution concerns mainly the part-music seventeenth-century poets are likely to have known intimately as participants in private musical gatherings and in the liturgy.

Primary consideration is given to Donne, Herbert, and Milton, with some attention to Marvell, Dryden, and others. These poets, though Donne perhaps only briefly, were associated with Cambridge University, and I have therefore made Cambridge the principal location of historical and cultural contexts. However, most major composers were members of the Chapel Royal, and their music was performed throughout the realm. Herbert and Milton were accomplished musicians, and Donne wrote poems that were set and sung. All three expressed interest in liturgical music, composed "hymns," versified psalms or scriptural songs, and wrote poems for the seasons of the liturgical year that the music of those seasons often illuminates.

Chapter 1 discusses the theory and practice of relating texts and music by word-painting, structure, and expressiveness to show how

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close listening to the music of this period can enrich close reading of its poetry. Chapter 2 discusses relations among poetry, choral music, and the visual arts as epitomized in King's College Chapel; continuities and changes in the treatment of words in English polyphony; and the church music controversy of the Reformation. The next three chapters are devoted to Donne, Herbert, and Milton in turn. The last chapter looks at musical encomia in which the praise of music reaches a formal zenith but begins to become detached from earlier interest in its relation to words and treats it as a separate art.

Scholars have devoted much study to ways in which words affect Renaissance and early baroque music, but less to ways in which music affects words. Many poems are charged with music that we cannot hear unless we know the music their authors heard and sang. Musical genres bring a wealth of connotation to poems that adopt or allude to them just as literary genres do; and musical culture affects language not only by providing rhythm, imagery, and metaphor but by entering into diction, form, nuances of prosody, and configurations of words. I have given close analysis to poems and musical analogues and provided historical contexts addressed to the general reader concerning philosophy, politics, and performance practice. The comparisons of particular compositions and poems are not meant to demonstrate explicit "influence" or authorial intention, but to let readers share poets' experience and to consider ways that music may affect language as represented by these examples. My attention to English polyphony is not meant to subordinate solo song, theatre music, classical and Renaissance rhetoric and poetics, and other contexts, but to show how church music and other part-music contribute to the verbal close-weaving of seventeenth-century verse.

Of the three poets discussed in depth, Herbert and Milton are the most intrinsically musical, but musical culture has an important part in Donne's poetry as well. The *Songs and Sonets* often respond to popular lute songs and madrigals and the divine poems to church music; and these musical awarenesses bear on Donne's renovations of language and the complex tonalities of his poems. Herbert and Milton incorporated qualities of music into their poems that helped to give the English language extraordinary fullness, refinement, and resilience by weaving together resonant words and forms as polyphony weaves sounds. While it may be

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argued that any good poetry does so, poems of this period, and theirs especially, have a density and a plenitude of connections that go beyond verbal coherence and suggest a musical kind of writing. Like polyphony, their poems have complex structural as well as conceptual significance and are composed in vertical harmonies, as well as linear verses, with finely tuned overtones as well as fundamentals. Verbal resonance may not have the simultaneity of musical chords; but, much as the singer of a motet or a madrigal has to keep to a particular line but can with increasing familiarity increasingly hear its relations to all the others, so a reader of poetic lines harmonically in tune with each other, though reading linearly, can increasingly hear those resonances as verbal concords: an experience able to cure overly linear thinking and expand awareness of multiple connections in the nature of things.

"Just concent" is the harmony produced by the pure intonation in which Renaissance and early baroque music was sung and played and which links it to the numerical proportions observable in nature. Seventeenth-century poetry absorbs this art and endues language with a kind of precise diction that tunes words to each other as pure intonation tunes both the fundamentals and the overtones (which include dissonances) of musical chords. This precision does not decrease, but increases, the polysemousness of words, much as pure intonation increases the audibility of parts. The more words "concent" together – the more exactly tuned they are to each other's sounds and meanings – the more connections they reveal. Virtually all memorable poetry has links to music; but the music of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when music was most consciously being wedded to words by musical humanism and church music reform, appears to have given these poets a heightened consciousness of the resources of musical experience not only for form and prosody but also for the harmonic concinnities of words.

This project raises at least three theoretical questions. First, can one argue from contemporary settings of analogous texts that Herbert's hymns or Milton's angelic anthems are permeable to the music of Tallis, Tomkins, or Monteverdi? The proof will be in the listening, and my hope is that readers will find their readings of poems enriched and germinated, critical puzzles untangled, and the significance of poetic forms expanded by the examples offered here. Second, can argument by analogy demonstrate actual

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connections? While there is always some slippage when comparing different arts, I think that musical analogy is a natural part of the production of language by poets immersed in a musical and religious culture. It is more reasonable to compare language and musical proportion in the work of artists who believe that a creator designed the cosmos and the perceiving mind with natural correspondences than in the work of those who believe that the universe is a flux of phenomena upon which we impose structures devised by minds that are also fluxes of phenomena. Most poets are analogists, as metaphor requires, but Renaissance poets were philosophical ones, believing that art participated in a divine creative process and discerning analogies between the design of the cosmos and the design of the mind. "Analogy" means according to, or with, *logos*, which means both "word" and "ratio," reason and proportion. Whether there is any "real" connection is a theological question. Third, what are the implications of the relation between words and music for the views that all human language is "fallen," "meaning" is inaccessible, or significance has little relation to what an author does in the act of composition?

The numerical proportions of music, supposed eternal, cannot be intrinsically fallen, though music, like language, can be deceptively used. Words cannot be put to mathematical proof and declared universal, as musical proportions can, but the doctrine of the Fall did not require seventeenth-century poets to believe that all language since Adam's remains fallen, since the doctrine of regeneration also applied. Some theorists thought that "the language of Adam" was univocal and all polysemousness a mark of fallenness. But that assumption implies a static creation by an authoritarian God. For poets, multiple meanings, though corruptible, are no more intrinsically fallen than partials within musical notes; they are elements of creativity, part of the generative and regenerative potency for discovery and connection endowed by a creative Logos.

The conception of cosmic concinnity produced a fecund mating of matter and spirit in the arts partly because it was undergoing ferment and change. The new philosophy had been disrupting static ideas of nature for half a century when the earliest poems included here were written, and the sense of process produced by telescopic and microscopic observation may be seen in experiments in language, music, and political revolution. Musical

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poetic language not only sounds musical but operates, as music does, as cosmic discovery. Musicians explore the world of mathematical proportions made audible in consonant (and dissonant) sound, and poets explore the world of language and find that it provides not just linear but harmonic constructions that, like the harmonies of music, result in more than parallel lines of signification. Works of art having complex concinnities of sound and significance produce new places in the universe – lodgings, Herbert calls them – that are not just manipulations of parts but new areas of consciousness. The oceanic change where Renaissance and "new" philosophy still mingled, and reason was not yet confined to rationality, opened new discovery routes for exploring the significance of creation.

Like any literary study, this one offers one voice among many. Other writers have addressed the historical and artistic relations between poetry and music from different but related points of view. James Winn in *Unsuspected Eloquence* considers relations between words and music from ancient to modern times. S. K. Heninger, Jr. in *Touches of Sweet Harmony* elucidates the effects of cosmology on poetics. Music scholars who discuss the setting of texts include David Wulstan in *Tudor Music*, Joseph Kerman in *The Elizabethan Madrigal* and *The Masses and Motets of William Byrd*, and Peter Phillips in *English Sacred Music, 1549–1649*. Among literary scholars, John Stevens studies relations between poetry and music in medieval and early Tudor courts; Bruce Pattison gathers information about the secular and social musical environment of Elizabethan poetry; and Gretchen Finney's *Musical Backgrounds for English Literature, 1580–1650* discusses music theory with special reference to Milton. Wilfred Mellers evocatively describes the relations of music to text and society in *Harmonious Meeting*, and John Hollander's *The Untuning of the Sky* brings formidable scholarship to words about music. Winifred Maynard's *Elizabethan Lyric Poetry and its Music* studies lyric verse of Tudor and Stuart song-books, miscellanies, ballads, masques, and plays, and Robert Toft's study of song performance, *Tune Thy Musicke To Thy Heart*, compares verbal and musical rhetorical figures. Elise Bickford Jorgens and Louise Schleiner show how composers interpret the verses they set, and Schleiner makes extended comparisons of Milton's verse with Italian monody. Other work on musical settings and contexts includes John Caldwell, Edward Olleson, and Susan Wollenberg,

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The Well-Enchanting Skill: Music, Poetry, and Drama in the Culture of the Renaissance; Rivkah Zim, *English Metrical Psalms: Poetry as Praise and Prayer, 1535–1601*; Mary Chan, *Music in the Theatre of Ben Jonson*; Willa Evans, *Ben Jonson and Elizabethan Music* and *Henry Lawes: Musician and Friend of Poets*; and the work of Thomas O. Calhoun and Thomas King on settings of poems by Abraham Cowley in *The Collected Works*, II:1.

During the twentieth century, music scholars have greatly increased the availability of Renaissance and early baroque choral music by assembling and editing part-books and, especially in the past twenty years, reforming performance practice. Polyphonic music grows more beautiful the better one knows it, and the best ways to know it are to sing it, to hear live performances, and to follow scores while listening to recorded ones, paying attention to each part and particularly to the inner ones. A beginner might try Dowland's setting of the hundreth psalm (from Ravenscroft's *Whole Book of Psalmes*, 1621, in Diana Poulton's modern edition) in which the familiar Sternhold and Hopkins tune ("Old Hundredth") appears in the tenor voice. Readers who do not read musical notation can still hear performances and find increased pleasure in the music of poetry. Performances, to which I am much indebted, of most of the musical works mentioned in this study are cited in the discography. Also appended are a list of selected poetry, music, and iconography for the liturgical year, a chronology of historical, biographical, architectural, musical, and poetic events, and a glossary of musical and liturgical terms.

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CHAPTER 1

Nature's voice: concent of words and music

In Henry Purcell's setting of Nicholas Brady's *Ode on St. Cecilia's Day*, the chorus apostrophizes Music:

> Soul of the World! inspir'd by thee,
> The jarring Seeds of Matter did agree,
> Thou didst the scatter'd Atoms bind,
> Which, by the Laws of true proportion join'd,
> Made up of various Parts one Perfect Harmony.

Brady's words sum up a musical conception of the cosmos, and Purcell's music offers auricular proof: jarring chords by tremulous strings on "jarring Seeds" beg for resolution, voices agree homophonically on "agree" and scatter in separate lines on "scatter'd," various voice parts sing "various Parts," modulation displays harmonic proportions on "true proportion," and a lingering cadence on "one Perfect Harmony" ends with one perfect tonic chord. "Inspir'd" – from *in* and *spirare,* to breathe in or into, as God is said to animate Adam – receives an animated series of rising phrases between which the singers may quickly breathe in: Purcell fills the musical metaphor with both the spiritual and the physical meaning of the word to show the power of music as the "anima" that orders and moves the physical world.

Seventeenth-century minds and ears perceived music as the formative soul of the cosmos made audible. In the shifting world of sense and intellection, music witnesses to something real: number, hence rhythm and harmonic proportion, hence music, are everlasting. Since these actualities are infinitely recombinable, the unchangeable gives room for, in fact makes possible, unlimited creativity. Harmony allows "various Parts." Remarkably, when music combines with words, these differing substances can be felicitously matched to animate and confirm each other. Because of

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the variety of ways in which musical treatment of words strikes the mind and senses as congruent, the "concent" between words and music reveals correspondences between cosmic design and the design of the mind. If both the universe and the human soul are "inspir'd" with the musical proportions of universal numbers, the fundamentals of creation, music can heal the soul by retuning it to those intervals and rhythms that make audible the design of the world and the attributes of the designer. "The heavens are telling the glory of God" sings the Psalmist; and as the celestial bodies in their orderly yet varied motions display glory visibly, the orderly plenitude of music displays it audibly. While astronomers with their optic glasses searched the body of the cosmos, composers of music investigated its soul.

Music is said to encompass three levels: the music of the spheres, or abstract eternal numbers; the music of the soul; and practical or audible music.[1] The music of the spheres is that set of proportions in the arrangements of the heavenly bodies which, Pythagoras taught, corresponds with the concords of music, so that, as Adam and Eve describe them in *Paradise Lost*, they "move / In mystic Dance not without Song" (5.177–78).[2] The Ptolemaic cosmic map corresponds with the Pythagorean musical scale, in which only fourths, fifths, and octaves are considered consonant; but Kepler understood the universe as sun-centered and believed that the cosmos corresponded with the "just intonation" of polyphony: that is, in a heliocentric universe, his measurements of the relations of the planets corresponded with the mathematical proportions in which thirds and sixths are most consonant.[3] The new cosmology, by throwing all in doubt, both created new anxieties and opened new possibilities for the mind, the body politic, and the arts, and these corresponded with an intonation whose mathematics requires that voices must constantly adjust to each other to produce "perfect harmony."

The music of soul is the set of proportions in which, Plato believed, a human being is composed. When discomposed they can be reharmonized by music. Just as "*God's Poem*" is made of elements corresponding with choral voices, the microcosm Man "is all o'er *Harmony*," Abraham Cowley writes in *Davideis* (1.451–76): "*Storehouse* of all *Proportions*! *single Quire*!" whom in the beginning "*God's Breath* did tunefully inspire." The charms of music can there-

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fore heal both body and soul, as David's music healed Saul's, "Not by their *Force*, but *Party* that's within."

Practical music is the music we can hear. Everything in nature has the capacity to make it. Wood, metal, skin, flesh, bones – all things that can be made to vibrate – set the air in motion in various timbres; wind, water, and ingenuity can extract this intrinsic music. For Henry Vaughan in *The Morning-Watch*, all nature and all creatures sing to God as a "quick" manifestation of the inaudible cosmos:

> In what rings,
> And *hymning circulations* the quick world
> Awakes, and sings;
> The rising winds,
> And falling springs,
> Birds, beasts, all things
> Adore him in their kinds.
> Thus all is hurled
> In sacred *hymns*, and *order*, the great *chime*
> And *symphony* of nature.

Thomas Traherne, contemplating the hymn "of every creature" (Rev. 5.13) in *Thanksgivings for the Glory of God's Works*, exults that what Milton in *At a Solemn Musick* calls "the fair musick that all creatures made" at the first creation shall be renewed:

> That we shall hear all Creatures
> In Heaven and Earth
> So praising thee,
> Plainly sheweth, that we shall
> Understand their Natures,
> See their Beings,
> Know their Excellencies,
> Take Pleasure in them.

For many poets and composers, human beings are artist-priests of nature's voice because they can shape music into articulate language. The human body is a delicately constructed musical instrument, having pipes, strings, bellows, resonating chambers, and a mouthpiece that can shape music into words and so join the beauty of number with the beauty of thought, which move the heart and mind in concordant ways. Joining words to music is a fundamental human vocation. William Byrd prefaces his *Psalmes, Sonets, and Songs* (1588) with "Reasons . . . to perswade euery one

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to learne to sing," one being that "The better the voice is, the meeter it is to honour and serue God there-with; and the voyce of man is chiefly to be imployed to that ende." James Clifford asserts that since choral singing will be our "employment in Heaven, it will be a wretchless and unexcusable neglect not to mind it here on earth."[4] John Donne describes himself in a *Hymne to God my God, in my sicknesse* as an instrument preparing to join God's "Musique." George Herbert claims in *Providence* that "Beasts fain would sing; birds dittie to their notes"; since only "Man" can do both, he is "Secretarie" of creation's praise. Milton's Adam and Eve join their "vocal Worship to the Choir / Of Creatures wanting voice" and invoke "all ye Creatures" to join their orisons (9.197–99; 5.164).

Brady addresses Music: "Thou tun'dst this World below, the Spheres above, / Who in the Heavenly Round to their own Music move": when both worlds are tuned by music they are tuned to each other. Purcell illustrates with apt pitches for "below" and "above" and gives "World" and "Spheres" similar yet inverse melodies. A new variation of the figure appears on "Round" while the triple rhythm imitates the swing and recurrence of their round dance. These two lines, utterly natural and charming, are sung first by a soprano or cantus voice and then by the four-part chorus; when in performance these lines are repeated, the first (about the two worlds) occurs twice each time, and the second (about the spheres) four times, so that eight repetitions of the second line, with variations (like Donne's "trepidation of the spheares" or Milton's "vicissitude"[5]), represent the eight spheres moving in parts "to their own Music." "Move" runs up and down, but more up than down, in swingingly extended figures on lilting dotted notes, so that the "Heavenly Round" seems to dance in expanding circles.

While the spheres were being retuned – not untuned – by the new philosophy, seventeenth-century writers and composers intensified this sense of relation among creator, cosmos, soul, music, and language. Sir Thomas Browne denies the audibility of cosmic music but affirms its intelligibility:

> [T]here is a musicke where-ever there is a harmony, order or proportion; and thus farre we may maintain the musick of the spheares; for those well ordered motions, and regular paces, though they give no sound unto the eare, yet to the understanding they strike a note most full of harmony. Whatever is harmonically composed delights in harmony; which makes

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