

Constable's *Spiritual Sonnettes* and the Three Spiritual Ways

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In her introduction to *The Poems of Henry Constable*, Joan Grundy comments that Constable's *Spiritual Sonnettes: To the honour of God and hys Sayntes* has been "unduly neglected," for this "sequence, as well as providing one of the earliest examples of the effect of the Counter-Reformation upon English verse, contains the best sonnets on religious themes written in English before Donne" (80).¹⁾ One of the factors which may be responsible for this

1) Grundy indicates that the sonnets cannot be dated, though the "familiarity they display with Catholic doctrine and emotion . . . suggests that they are the work of an experienced worshipper in that religion rather than of a recent convert" (59). Constable (1562-1613) converted in or around 1590 (33). From her analysis of the handwriting, Grundy dates the manuscript from the late sixteenth to early seventeenth century (101). Thomas Roche in *Petrarch and*

neglect is the sequence's apparent lack of organization. The seventeen sonnets individually address figures in the heavenly hierarchy in regular, descending order from "God the Father" to St. Margaret until the final six, where we find another three sonnets each to the Virgin Mary and St. Mary Magdalene. Yet Constable's prefatory note, "The order of the booke," to his earlier secular sonnet sequence, *Diana*, reflects a concern for meticulous organization. The preface begins, "The sonets following are divided into 3 parts, each parte contayning 3 severall arguments, and every argument 7 sonets."² Using the paradigm of hierarchical and chronological order, Grundy finds the final six sonnets to be merely attached as "extras" (58-59). Thomas Roche in *Petrarch and the English Sonnet Sequence* rejects this structural model in favor of that found in the Confiteor, Litanies of the Saints, and other Catholic devotional offices. Yet he, too, is unable to account for the last six sonnets: "The arrangement borrows from traditional services but differs from them by including the sonnet to the Blessed Sacrament, by repeating both the Blessed Virgin and Mary Magdalene and by including St. Margaret" (189).

An alternative structural paradigm, which, by focusing on the content, rather than addressee, of the poems, does accommodate the final six sonnets is that of the "three spiritual ways," the scheme of the soul's progression to God developed by Evagrius Ponticus, Pseudo-Dionysius, and later Church Fathers (Bouyer 244). Constable's sequence represents the stages in the soul's progress in the so-called purgative, illuminative, and unitive ways.

As discussed in Louis Bouyer's *Introduction to Spirituality*, the purgative

the English Sonnet Sequences states that the sequence is undoubtedly earlier than Nicolas Breton's *The Soules Harmony* (1602)(188).

2) All direct quotations from Constable's work are taken from Grundy's edition (Great Britain: Liverpool UP, 1960).

way is characterized “by the struggle against habitual sins” (245) and “the sensible impressions, of the flesh and the world together, by which the devil holds us in slavery to sin” (251). These impressions, or “pathe,” as Evagrius refers to them, are produced on our will by a sensibility which the exclusive quest of egotistic pleasure has as it were crazed” (251). The soul in the illuminative stage enjoys “relative dominance over the sensible impressions” (246) and “is no longer preoccupied and as it were encumbered by a wholly sensual view of things” (262). With the corresponding growth in charity (262-64) and the practice of “meditation on the divine Word” (273), the soul develops “gnosis,” or experiential knowledge of the “truths of faith” (246) and of the mystery of the Godhead (274). In the unitive way the soul

tends to union with God in a superior form of contemplation in which the charity poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit finds its development. Then, . . . the “gifts” of the Spirit, moving the soul directly and as it were perceptibly, outweigh the still laborious exercise of the virtues. (246)

That Constable, as a Roman Catholic, would have known the doctrine of the three spiritual ways may be assumed given its prominence in the tradition of Catholic Christian spirituality. More direct evidence is the “doctrinal accuracy” and “erudition” that, as Grundy notes, are displayed in sonnets such as “To God the Father” and “To God the Holy-ghost” (81). Moreover, according to Grundy, certain passages displaying Constable’s erudition indicate that he had read St. Bonaventura’s *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum* and *Commentary upon Luke*, which discuss the soul’s ascent to God (249).³⁾

3) According to Grundy’s gloss on “Seraphin” in “To God the Holy-ghost,”

The whole sestet of this sonnet is soaked in the angel-lore of such writers as Dionysius the Areopagite and St. Bonaventura. . . . [I]n his *Itinerarium Mentis*

Contributing to the representation of the soul's progress to God along the three spiritual ways is Constable's adaptation of several conventions of Petrarchan⁴⁾ love poetry, such as the address to a lady; the use of certain expressions and images, including those representing sexual love; and the sonnet form itself. George Wickes in "Henry Constable's *Spiritual Sonnets*" remarks that "repeatedly Constable turns to the artificial language and manner of Petrarchism to describe spiritual emotions. In doing so he both ridicules the convention and rejects his early love poetry" (38). The disparaging references to the amatory sonnet form by a poet who had written a secular sonnet sequence celebrating earthly love and feminine beauty thus help portray the soul's struggle against domination by the sensible impressions, or *pathe*,..... in the purgative way and its mastery of them in the illuminative way. The use of Petrarchan conventions to express "spiritual emotions" includes imagery of sensuous, physical pleasure in the final six sonnets. As ironic references to Petrarchan poetry, these images support the statements of rejection of earthly, amorous passion in this group of poems, but as images of intimate physical love they help convey the experience of the soul's communion with God in the unitive way.

In analyzing *Spiritual Sonnettes* according to the progression of the three spiritual ways, we do not find the poems group themselves into a three-part structure. In the first eleven sonnets there is considerable interplay between the

in Deum, [St. Bonaventura] makes their [seraphin's] wings a symbol of the six successive grades of illumination, to the quiet of contemplation; similarly in his *Commentary upon Luke* (ch. IX), he compares grace and its concomitants to wings, upon which the soul is enabled to rise to its creator (249).

4) "Petrarchan" here and in subsequent passages will refer chiefly to later developments of Petrarch's love poetry in the works of Wyatt, Sidney, Spenser, and other poets of the English Renaissance, rather than to the *Canzoniere*.

representation of the soul in the purgative and illuminative stages. Poems in which the illumined soul reflects knowledge of and meditates on a divine mystery or saint's life occur with poems in which meditation in the octave is subordinated to struggle for purification in the sestet. Often the struggle appears in the form of a petition to the addressee for freedom from earthly desires.⁵⁾ Bouyer points out that the "distinction between the three ways should not be overdone" (245) and cites Evagrius' caution against the strict separation of the first two phases:

It cannot be flatly said that illumination comes after purification, as though they were two operations having nothing to do with one another [S]ince the principle of all Christian purification is faith, there can be no true purification otherwise than on the basis of a first and fundamental illumination. Conversely, . . . purification cannot be completed except by "gnosis," . . . that is, the understanding of God, the development of which characterizes the illuminative way. (261)

The only structural division that might be said to occur in Constable's sequence, then, is that between the first eleven sonnets, which represent the soul in the purgative and illuminative ways, and the final six, which chiefly portray it in communion with the divine in the unitive way.

He begins by addressing each person of the Trinity in a sonnet. In "To God the Father," he meditates in the octave on the Trinity's origin in God's "simple essence":

5) An exception is the fifth sonnet, the first of the four sonnets "To our blessed Lady," which includes an exhortation to earthly queens following the meditation in the octave.

Greate God: within whose symple essence, wee
 nothyng but that, which ys thy self can fynde:
 when on thyself thou dydd'st reflect thy mynde, thy thought
 was God, which tooke the forme of thee:
 And when this God thus borne, thou lov'st, & hee
 lov'd thee agayne, with passion of lyke kynde,
 (as lovers syghes, which meete, become one wynde,
 both breath'd one spryght of aequall deitye. (1-8)

The simile of the "lovers syghes" in line seven recalls the love sonnets in *Diana*, which, in the first sonnet in the sequence Constable had called "sighes in verse" (3). The effect is an impression of drastic change in the poet's former state as enthralled lover and of a soul "no longer preoccupied . . . by a wholly sensual view of things." Illumined by faith in the Trinitarian God, he petitions in the sestet for renovation of mind and heart:

Aeternall father, whence theis twoe do come
 and wil'st the tyle of my father have,
 an heavenly knowledge in my mynde engrave,
 That yt thy sonnes true Image may become:
 and sence my hart, with syghes of holy Love,
 that yt the temple of the Spright may prove. (9-14)

The images in lines twelve and fourteen parallel Bouyer's discussion on the effort of the soul in the purgative way "to extricate the divine image within us from everything that has befouled it" and to become the "temple of the Holy Trinity" (248). A second reference to the Petrarchan image of the lovers' sighs, "syghes of holy Love," implies the soul's renunciation of the sighs of earthly love. The sequence begins, then, with a poem in which portraying the soul's

knowledge of one of the truths of faith, the origin of the second and third persons of the Trinity, in the octave is subordinated to showing its struggle for purification in the sestet.

The second sonnet, a meditation on Christ's two-fold lineage as Son of God and son of Mary, represents the soul in the illuminative way. The octave reads:

Greate Prynce of heaven begotten of that kyng,
 who rules the kyngdome, that himselfe dyd make:
 and of that vyrgyn Queene, mannes shape did take
 which from kynge Davyds royal stock dyd sprynge:
 No mervayle though thy byrth mayd Angells synge:
 and Angells dyttyes, shepehyrdes pypes awake:
 and kynges lyke shepehyrdes, humbled for thy sake
 kneele at thy feete, & guyftes of homage brynge: (1-8)

The sestet returns to the point of the first quatrain to examine why it is "no mervayle" that angels as well as shepherds and kings should rejoice at the Nativity:

For heaven & earth, the hyghe & lowe estate
 as partners of thy byrth make aequall clayme.
 Angells, because in heaven God the begatt,
 Sheepehyrdes & kynges, because thy mother came
 from pryncely race, & yet by povertye
 mayd glory shyne in her humillitye. (9-14)

In the second poem, then, we see the soul's "meditation on the divine Word" as it develops knowledge of one of the truths of faith, the Incarnation, in the illuminative stage.

In the third sonnet, "To God the Holy ghost," meditation in the octave is again superseded by petition for purification in the sestet. The poet first reflects on the Third Person as "the Love / with which God, and his sonne ech other kysse" (1-2), "a loving dove" (4), and "fyery tongues" (6) at Pentecost. Then, with the turn in line nine, he asks for aid in fleeing "earth's desire":

True God of Love: from whom all true love sprynges,
 bestowe vpon my Love, thy wynges & fyre
 my sowle a spyrytt ys, and with thy wynges
 May lyke an Anngell fly from earths desyre:
 and with thy fyre a hart inflam'd may beare,
 and in thy syght a Seraphin appeare. (9-14)

The opening epithet True God of Love contains an ironical allusion to Cupid (Wicks 38), who thus becomes a false god of love from whom false love springs. The reference is thus part of the predominant image in the poem of a soul seeking to escape from the desires of the flesh in the purgative way.

The fourth sonnet, "To the blessed Sacrament," also chiefly represents the soul in this stage. In the octave, the illumed soul's "gnosis," in this case, knowledge of the truth of Transubstantiation, appears in the comparison of the Communion wafer to the slain body of Christ:

When thee (O holy sacrificed Lambe)
 in severed sygnes I whyte & liquide see:
 as on thy body slayne I thynke on thee,
 which pale by sheddyng of thy bloode became.
 And when agayne I doe beholde the same
 vayled in whyte to be receav'd of mee:
 thou seemest in thy syndon wrap't to bee

lyke to a corse, whose monument I am. (1-8)

With the sestet, the poem shifts to petition using an analogy between the consumed wafer and Christ in his burial and descent among the dead:

Buryed in me, vnto my sowle appeare
 pryson'd in earth, & bannish't from thy syght,
 lyke our forefathers, who in Lymbo were.
 Cleere thow my thoughtes, as thou did'st gyve the light:
 And as thou others freed from purgyng fyre
 quenche in my hart, the flames of badd desyre. (9-14)

The petition to Christ in the Sacrament to appear to the soul “pryson'd in earth,” to “Cleere thow my thoughtes,” and to put out the “purgying fire . . . of badde desyre” portrays the soul in the purgative way struggling to overcome “the sensible impressions, of the flesh and the world together, by which the devil holds us in slavery to sin.” Like the sonnets addressed to the first and third person in the Trinity, “To the blessed Sacrament” thus subordinates meditation on a divine mystery in the octave to petition for purification in the sestet, resulting in a predominant image of the soul in the purgative stage.

With the next poem, “To our blessed lady,” an adaptation of the secular sonneteer's address to his mistress, we return to the illuminative stage for several sonnets. This poem is chiefly a meditation on how the Virgin Mary was “lynk'd to all the trinitye” (8): born without original sin, she was granted, in keeping with her “byrthes nobillitye” (5), the Holy Spirit for her spouse and thus conceived God's only Son. The sestet exhorts earthly queens, who “glory in the pompe of worldly thynges” (10), to be humble before the supreme majesty of her “Who had your God, for father, spowse, & sonne” (14). The

image of the illumed soul's "relative dominance over the sensible impressions" in this sonnet is strengthened by the ironical use of the Petrarchan convention of a complimentary address to a lady.

The next three sonnets on the subject of saints' lives can be said to continue the representation of the soul in the illuminative stage. "To St Mychaell the Archangel" narrates the angel's exploits, first as God's commander in the battle against Satan and the fallen angels, then, in lines nine and ten, as defender of the Church against Satan. The final quatrain summarizes by asking,

Who ever try'd adventures lyke thys knyght?
Which generall of heaven, hell overthrewe;
for such a Lady as Goddes spouse dyd fyght:
and such a monster as the Dyvell subdue. (11-14)

"To St Iohn Baptist" compares Samuel and the New Testament prophet in the circumstances of their birth and in their office as commissioner of kings. This shared office leads to a secondary comparison of David with Christ in the closing couplet: ". . . God his flocke in humayne shape did feede, / as Israells kynge kept his in sheepehirdes weede" (13-14). "To St Peter and St Paul" identifies paradoxes in the careers of the two saints in the octave: Peter, who denied Christ, fearing a "maydens voyce" (2), defied "the myghtyest Monarche of the earth" (3); Paul, who "helpt to shedd the fyrst of Martyrs bloode" (6), died a martyr next to the "cheife Apostle" (8). The significance of their martyrdoms for the establishment of the Roman papacy is treated in the sestet.

After the sustained representation of the soul meditating on a truth of faith or on saints' lives in the illuminative way, Constable returns to depicting the soul in the purgative stage in the ninth sonnet, "To St Mary Magdalen." The

octave is a meditation on the addressee's life, but particularly on her repentance and expiation of lust, so that the emphasis is on purification rather than illumination. The poet employs a Provençal legend of the saint, that, during the thirty years before her death, she led a life of severe penance on the hill of La Sainte-Baume (Grundy 252):

For fewe nyghtes solace in delitious bedd,
 where heate of luste, dyd kyndle flames of hell:
 thou nak'd on naked rocke in desert cell
 lay thirty yeares, and teares of grieve dyd shedd.
 But for that tyme, thy hart there sorrowed,
 thou now in heaven aeternally dost dwell,
 and for ech teare, which from thyne eyes then fell,
 a sea of pleasure now ys rendered. (1-8)

Mary Magdalene's earlier indulgence in sexual passion is effectively characterized by a familiar term in the English secular sonnet tradition, "solace." The portrayal of the soul's struggle to overcome lust implicit in this meditation on the saint's later career is explicit in the sestet:

If short delyghtes, entyce my hart to straye,
 lett me by thy longe pennance learne to knowe
 how deare I should for triflyng pleasures paye:
 And if I vertues roughe beginnyng shunne,
 Lett thy aeternall ioys vnto me showe
 what hyghe Rewarde, by lyttle payne ys wonne. (9-14)

The petition that the saint's example of repentance and mortification and of her eternal recompense might aid the poet in resisting lust clearly represents the soul

in the purgative way.

The next sonnet, "To St Katharyne," returns to the emphasis on the soul's meditation in the illuminative way. Addressed to a fourth-century Alexandrian martyr whom tradition described as exceptionally beautiful and eloquent ("St. Catherine"), the poem contains the most explicit reference to Petrarchan love poetry thus far. Constable begins by saying that he might address her in the guise of a traditional sonneteer:

Because thow wast the daughter of a kyng,
whose beautye, dyd all natures workes exceede,
and wysedome, wonder to the world dyd breede,
a Muse myght rayse yt self on Cupids wyng. (1-4)

He then declares that, since her earthly endowments were enhanced and etherealized by divine grace,

my muse doth neede
an Angells feathers, when thy prayse I synge.
For all in thee, became Angelycall:
an Angells face, had Angells puritye:
and thou an Angells tongue did'st speake withall. (7-11)

The poet's rejection of "Cupids wyng," or the amatory sonnet form used in *Diana*, as a vehicle of praise for the saint and his contemplation in lines nine through eleven of her etherealized beauty and eloquence represent a soul "no longer preoccupied . . . by a wholly sensual view of things" in the illuminative way.

"To St Margarett" shifts the focus once again to the purgative way. The

sonnet begins with two specific allusions to the secular sonnet tradition:

Fayre Amazon of heaven: who took'st in hand
 St Mychaell, & St George to imitate:
 and for a tyrantes Love transform'd to hate,
 wast for thy lylly faith retayn'd in bande: (1-4)

According to Wickes, the opening epithet, "Fair Amazon of heaven," is "a transformation no doubt of the Petrarchists' *bella guerriera*" (38). Another adaptation occurs in "lylly faith." The stock adjective appears in *Diana* in "Thy . . . breast sweet lilye is" (II.iv.2) and the association of "lilies leaues" with "her white hands" (III.i.3-4). Such reminders of Constable's earlier addresses to his mistress allow us to see more clearly in his address to St. Margaret the soul's subjugation of the once powerful sensible impressions in the illuminative way.

In the second quatrain he continues his narration of the saint's legend:

Alone on foote, & with thy naked hande
 thou dydd'st lyke Mychaell, & his hoste: & that
 for which on horse arm'd George we celebrate:
 whylst thow lyke them, a dragon dydd'st withstande. (5-8)

Imprisoned by the "tyrant" Olybius, Roman prefect of Antioch, whose love she had refused, she was devoured by the devil in the form of a dragon, but escaped through an opening in his belly that formed because of the cross she was carrying ("St. Margaret"). Constable draws an analogy with his soul's condition as he petitions St. Margaret in the sestet:

Behold my sowle shutt in my bodyes Iayle,

the which the Drake of hell, gapes to devoure;
 Teache me (o virgyn) how thou dydd'st prevayle:
Virginity thou saiest was all thy Ayde:
 gyve me then purity in steade of power,
 and let my soule mayd chaste, passe for a Mayde. (9-14)

The soul's struggle for release from "the sensible impressions, of the flesh and the world together, by which the devil holds us in slavery to sin" is clearly shown in the poet's plea that his soul, imprisoned in the body, and about to be devoured by the devil, might escape by a purity such as that of the virgin saint's. As in several of the preceding poems, a predominant image of the soul in the purgative stage is created by subordinating reflection in the octave to petition in the sestet.

In the first eleven sonnets of the sequence, then, poems which emphasize the soul's wish for purification alternate with those confined to showing the soul in meditation on a divine mystery or a saint's life. As we have seen, this may be because simultaneity was a feature of the three spiritual ways. Yet a clear departure from the first eleven sonnets in the representation of the soul in the third, unitive stage does occur in the final six sonnets. While the poet continues to seek the release from earthly passion that characterizes the purgative way, there is a distinct shift to a more intimate, personal tone, creating a predominant image of the soul in the unitive way.

J. de Oliveira e Silva in "Plainness and Truth': The Secular and Spiritual Sonnets of Henry Constable" notes that Constable is "distinctly impersonal in praising God 'the Father,' 'the Sonne,' and 'the Holy-ghost' in the first three *Spirituell Sonnettes*" (35). Nor do we sense a personal relationship with the addressee in any of the other sonnets in this first group. However, several features unique to the last six sonnets convey a more personal, familiar attitude

toward the addressee and toward God. First, the nature of the petition is different. In the previous sonnets, the poet generally asks the divine mystery or saint he is addressing for freedom from earthly, sensuous love; the image of the soul's struggle for purification is uppermost. In the final six sonnets, although he may continue to seek release from earthly desires, he also petitions or yearns for the experience of divine love, which is often a means of achieving, and even a goal beyond, this release. Thus, the image of the soul's desire for union with the divine is predominant.

Second, petition takes precedence, occurring in the octave, in four of the sonnets. The petitions in the first eleven poems are deferred to the sestet. Constable's choice of Our Lady and Mary Magdalen as auditors may reflect his wish to employ petition in the octave of these sonnets: by choosing saints already addressed, he can dispense with the introductory, impersonal meditation *on the saint's legend in the octave*. A third source of the more intimate tone is Constable's use of the first person pronoun in both the octave and sestet of all six sonnets. Only three of the sonnets among the first eleven poems employ this pronoun in both octave and sestet; five do not use the first person pronoun at all.

Finally, the use of images of sexual pleasure in the sestet of several of the sonnets contributes to the intimate tone and directly portrays the soul in the unitive way. The images function not only as ironic references to secular, amatory verse, which, with other Petrarchan allusions, indicate the soul's continued struggle against earthly desires, but as vivid metaphors for the close union of the soul with God. Consistent with this imagery are passages designating the soul as a "spowse," rather than "spyrytt," as in "To God the Holy-ghost," or "mayde," as in the sonnet to St. Margaret just analyzed.

The combination of these features creating an impression of the poet's

personal relationship with the addressee and with God portray the soul in the third, unitive way. Thus, the six sonnets are not merely duplications or “extras,” as Grundy believed, but the final development of Constable’s theme of the Christian soul’s progress to God along the three spiritual ways.

The first sonnet addressed “To our blessed Lady” contains a two-fold petition in the octave: first, that, if he becomes ambitious for worldly advancement, he might witness the surpassing majesty of her son enthroned in heaven “whose servants reigne, our kynges & queenes above” (4), and, second, if he is tempted by “alluryng passions” (5) and “pleasyng sighes” (6), he might behold “thy lovely face: / whose beames the Angells beuty do deface: / and even inflame the Seraphins with love” (6-8). As in “To God the Father,” our sense of the poet’s rejection of earthly desire is increased by the Petrarchan allusion in the oxymoronic “pleasyng sighes.” After making his petition, he describes what will result if it is granted:

So by Ambition I shall humble bee:
 when in the presence of the highest kynge
 I serve all his, that he may honour mee.
 And love, my hart to chaste desyres shall brynge,
 when fayrest Queene lookes on me from her throne
 and jealous byddes me love but her alone. (9-14)

Wickes comments that Constable “employs the tone and language of the love sonnet in addressing the Virgin Mary as a mistress who jealously demands all his love . . .” (38). But while the poet often demonstrates the concern of the sonnets in the first section with freedom from fleshly passion, here he seeks to achieve this, not by penance or by flight, but by contemplating and loving the divine alone. This change in tactic, with the placement of the petition in the

octave and the recurrence of the first person pronoun, creates an impression of the soul's personal engagement with the divine which is new to the *Spirituell Sonnettes*.

The second and third sonnets addressed to the Virgin Mary include images of sexual enjoyment as metaphors for the soul's delight in union with the divine. In the first poem, the question raised in the opening line "Why should I any love O queene but thee?" is answered as follows in the sestet:

An earthlye syght doth onely please the eye,
 and breedes desyre, but doth not satisfye:
 thy sight, gyves vs possession of all ioye,
 And with such full delyghtes ech sense shal fyll,
 as harte shall wyshe but for to see thee styll,
 and ever seyng, ever shall inioye. (9-14)

Bouyer refers to the concept of "spiritual marriage" as "itself the flowering of the unitive life" in the writings of St. Teresa and the commentaries on the Cantic of Canticles by Origen and St. Bernard (279). In her gloss on these lines Grundy quotes a passage from St. Bonaventura's *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum* which identifies this concept from the Cantic:

Finally, by love for Christ, hastening to embrace the Word Incarnate who comes, the soul receives in return from Him such heavenly delight that in a very ecstasy of love it finds itself anew experiencing such a relish and feeling of intimacy as can be only compared with the physical senses of taste and touch. The soul adorned with these new mystical senses is like the Spouse in the Cantic of Canticles, delighting with all its senses in the presence of the Bridegroom. (253)

In the conclusion of the next sonnet, in which the poet petitions the Virgin Mary for the pleasure of contemplating Christ's beauty, the imagery of sexual love is still more graphic:

Then shall my love of pleasure have his fyll,
 when beuty self in whom all pleasure ys,
 shall my enamored sowle embrace & kysse:
 And shall newe loves, & newe delyghtes distyll,
 which from my sowle shall gushe into my hart
 and through my body flowe to every part. (9-14)

The first of the final three sonnets to St. Mary Magdalene resembles the earlier one addressed to her in its petition for the saint's aid against earthly passion: "No longer let my synfull sowle, abyde / in feaver of thy fyrst desyre faynte" (5-6). The shift in emphasis between the two poems from the rejection of lust to the experience of divine love, however, appears in the second, antithetical clause of the same petition: "but lett that love which last thy hart did taynt / with panges of thy repentance, pierce my syde" (7-8). The love for God which stirred her to repentance, rather than her "long pennance" described in the ninth sonnet, is the particular form of aid against sinful desire that he is requesting of her. An allusion to the concept of spiritual marriage in the unitive way occurs in the concluding image of the poet's heart burning like a lamp "in my spouses pallace" (14).

In the conclusion of the petition to Mary Magdalene in the next sonnet, the poet uses a traditional image of Cupid with his blindfold removed to express his wish to love God alone: "And if thou change the obiect of my love, / the wyng'd affection which men Cupid call / may gett his sight, & lyke an Angell prove" (12-14). Grundy's gloss cites Erwin Panofsky's *Studies in Iconology*,

which shows that in the iconographic tradition the god of sensual love personified divine love when represented without his blindfold (254).

Constable uses imagery of physical love to convey the soul's union with Christ most fully in the last sonnet to Mary Magdalen and final poem in the sequence. He addresses the "Sweet Saynt" (1) in the first quatrain as one who, being a woman and having experienced the pleasures of physical love, can best relate to him "what pleasure ys obtayn'd by heavenly love" (2). He explains why in the rest of the sonnet:

For lyke a woman spowse my sowle shalbee,
 whom synfull passions once to lust did move,
 and synce betrothed to goddes sonne above,
 should be enamored with his dietye.
 My body ys the garment of my spryght
 whyle as the day tyme of my lyfe doth last:
 when death shall brynge the nyght of my delyght
 My sowle vnclot'h'd, shall rest from labors past:
 and clasped in the armes of God, inioye
 by sweete coniunction, everlastyng ioye. (5-14)

Mary Magdalen can best communicate the soul's experience of eternal union with Christ because the experience is like that of a "woman spowse" in sexual intercourse. In this poem we find no trace of the purgative way in a petition to be extricated from earthly desire. The poet is one "whom synfull passions *once* to lust did move." Instead, he petitions her solely for the experience of divine love, communion with God in the unitive way.

The application to *Spirituell Sonnettes* of the paradigm of the Christian soul's progress in the three spiritual ways thus accounts for the appearance of the final six sonnets as the poems portraying the experience of the soul in the

third, unitive way. The repetition of addresses to two of the saints from the first section becomes less important than the features which create a personal, intimate tone: the predominant petitions for spiritual love and divine union; sustained petitions in four of the sonnets; frequent use of the first person pronoun; and, in three sonnets, the description of the soul's union with the divine through imagery of sexual pleasure. With the recognition that the entire sequence follows a unifying principle of organization will hopefully come greater receptivity to the merits of the individual sonnets.

An approach to the organization of *Spirituell Sonnettes* on the basis of the three spiritual ways appears fully warranted when we consider that contemporary spiritual sonnet sequences, including Henry Lok's 1597 edition of *Sundry Christian Passions* and Jean de la Ceppède's *Les Théorèmes sur le Sacré Mystère de Nostre Redemption* (1613), employ the theme of a three-stage progress of the soul. According to Barbara Lewalski in *Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric*, "the three parts of [Lok's] book present the classic Protestant paradigm of the way of salvation," treating, in their respective one hundred sonnets, the "soul's experience of sin and bondage," the "process of regeneration and sanctification as Christian pilgrimage and warfare," and the "works and praises appropriate to the regenerate state" (239-40). Lynette Black indicates that the theme of the three spiritual ways "provide[s] the distinguishing features of the three books of Part One of *Les Théorèmes*, according to the opening poem of each book. The invocation to Book I stresses purgation; the opening poem of Book II, illumination; and that of Book III, perfective union" (80). Turning to the secular poetry of the period, we find in *The Faerie Queen*, Book One, Canto Ten a precedent for the treatment of the theme using the paradigm of the three spiritual ways. As Joseph Collins observes in *Christian Mysticism in the Elizabethan Age*, the three stages in the

Redcross Knight's pilgrimage in this canto, the House of Holiness, the Hospital of Mercy, and Mountain of Contemplation, "correspond" through their "allegorical parallels" of "Redemption, Good Works, and Contemplation . . . to the three ways or stages of the mystical life, viz., Purgation, Illumination, and Perfection or Union" (193).⁶⁾

주제어: 헨리 컨스터블, 세 가지 영적인 길, 종교 소네트, 페트라르카 연애시, 영국 연작 소네트

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6) Spenser's use of the theme, as well as Collins' discussion, was pointed out to me by Professor Clarence Miller.

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Constable's *Spirituell Sonnettes* and the Three Spiritual Ways

Abstract

William Engels

Spirituell Sonnettes: To the honour of God and hys Sayntes by Henry Constable (1562-1613) has not received the recognition it deserves as the sequence containing arguably the finest religious sonnets in English before Donne's. One of the causes of this lack of recognition may be the sequence's apparent lack of organization. The seventeen sonnets individually address figures in the heavenly hierarchy in regular descending order from "God the Father" to St. Margaret until the final six, where we find another three sonnets each to the Virgin Mary and St. Mary Magdalene.

Applying the traditional structural paradigm of the "three spiritual ways," the scheme of the soul's progression to God developed by the Church Fathers, however, accommodates the final six sonnets and offers a view of the sequence as an organized whole. The first eleven sonnets represent the soul in the first two stages, purgation and illumination. Poems emphasizing the struggle for purification from earthly desires occur in a generally alternating pattern with poems in which the illumined soul reflects knowledge of, and meditates on, a divine mystery or saint's life. The lack of a formal division between the poems portraying the soul in the purgative way and those portraying it in the illuminative is consistent with the recursive nature of the soul's progress according to the doctrine of the three spiritual ways. The final six sonnets, however, consistently create a predominant image of the soul in the third, unitive stage through several features that create a personal, intimate tone:

petitioning the addressee for the experience of spiritual love and divine union; sustaining the petition through both octave and sestet in four of the sonnets; frequently using the first person pronoun; and, in three of the sonnets, describing the soul's union with the divine through imagery of sexual pleasure.

Contributing to the portrayal of the soul's progression along the three ways is Constable's adaptation of several conventions of Petrarchan love poetry: the address to a lady; the use of certain expressions and images, including those representing sexual love; and the sonnet form itself.

Key Words

Henry Constable, three spiritual ways, religious sonnet, Petrarchan love poetry, English sonnet sequences