

Burning the Heretic: Conscientious Revision in Henry Constable's "Falslie doth enuie
of youre praises blame".

Arthur Marotti has consistently pointed out that Renaissance lyric verse had a "social character", upheld by manuscript circulation. Poems were primarily composed in particular circumstances and "for known audiences".¹ When they passed beyond the initial circle of reception, they must have fallen into the hands of readers "much like the intended", on a second stage of transmission.² Afterwards, they were probably circulated in loose sheets or booklets, thus reaching a much wider audience, and in some cases ended up as items in miscellanies or poetic anthologies.³ As they were copied, poems were revised and modified, undergoing alterations and deletions by different hands. The malleability of texts in this process of transmission is well exemplified in the work of Elizabethan courtier-poet Henry Constable, whose sonnets survive in several manuscripts and two printed editions. On many occasions, collation reveals that the textual variants do not carry a change in meaning; however, there are some cases in which the different versions of the same sonnet are substantially different. The sonnet "Falslie doth enuie of your praises blame" has been preserved in various sources, and variants are striking. This article intends to analyse them, exploring the context of composition of the poem and the circumstances in which the different collections were compiled in an attempt to shed light on what seems to be—in this case—an instance of authorial revision.

Henry Constable, a gentleman-poet on the outer fringes of the court of Elizabeth, wrote his secular verse in the 1580s and early 1590s. During this period he was engaged in a series of diplomatic missions, zealously supporting the Protestant cause in Europe, while attempting to gain the support of the powerful and a respectable position at court. However, his religious stance was soon to change. George Wickes begins his biographical study describing Constable as a man who was "well on the way to a successful career at Elizabeth's court when he decided ... to lose all his heritage in order to save his soul" by converting to Catholicism around 1590.⁴ He went to France in 1591 as a member of Essex's expedition to assist Henry IV and once there he publicly

¹ Marotti, "Malleable and Fixed Texts", 56.

² Martines, 59.

³ Marotti, "Malleable and Fixed Texts", 58.

⁴ Wickes, "Henry Constable, Poet and Courtier, 1562-1613", 272.

defended the Catholic religion and left, becoming an exile of his own accord.⁵ Because of his conversion, “the whole direction of his life was altered”.⁶ He lost his inheritance and depended on an unreliable pension granted by Henry IV and what some relatives and friends in England contributed to his sustenance.⁷ Patriotism and religion were central concerns throughout his life and his literary production, the key elements in his constant bargaining for favour.

To his contemporaries, “Constable’s reputation was intimately connected with the vogue of the sonnet in the last decade of the sixteenth century”.⁸ The first edition of his secular sonnets was printed in 1592 under the title *Diana* (henceforth D92); it is a sequence of twenty-two sonnets with an extra introductory one. The editor, in his dedication “To the Gentlemen Readers”, alludes to Constable’s exile, observing that the sonnets “are now by misfortune left as Orphans”. This has been accepted as proof that he was not involved in the publication; however, the introductory sonnet, “To his absent Diana”, is not preserved anywhere else and Joan Grundy believes it could have been written especially for this edition, implying that the author “had at least given his consent to and had some concern in the publication”.⁹ The first *Diana* became so popular that in 1594 several editions were printed, including the D92 sonnets plus new ones by Constable and other authors (D94).¹⁰ Parker contends that Constable himself “could have furnished the printer with supplementary sonnets”, whereas Grundy points at the existence of a —now lost— manuscript (hereafter “Z”) as the source of those new sonnets that are actually his.¹¹ The text of the D92 sonnets in D94 remains practically unchanged.

Besides these two printed editions, several early manuscripts containing Constable’s works are extant. These are Marsh MS z.3.5.21, the Harington MS, and MS Dyce 44. If

⁵ This information is included in Anthony Tyrrell’s confession, enclosed by Justice Young in his letter to Sir Robert Cecil. Tyrrell had been told that “Mr. Constable spake very broad in maintenance of the Popish religion at a supper in Sir Roger Williams’ chamber, and that, fearing lest he should be sent back into England, he took his horses the next morning and rode away, and now he is in great favour with the King” (Roberts, “Cecil Papers: October 1593”, 381-406.)

⁶ Wickes, “Henry Constable, Poet and Courtier, 1562-1613”, 275.

⁷ See Stockard, “Henry Constable”, and Grundy, 36. Constable constantly emphasised his loyalty to England and the Queen in the letters he wrote to his acquaintances.

⁸ Wickes, “Henry Constable: Courtier Poet”, 102.

⁹ Grundy, 94.

¹⁰ Differences in typography and page decoration prove that there were at least two different editions in 1594, but the variants are insignificant and there is a tendency to refer to *the* 1594 *Diana*.

¹¹ Parker, 155, and Grundy, 89.

they are arranged chronologically, Marsh MS z.3.5.21 (henceforth “M”), at Marsh’s Library in Dublin, probably comes first. This manuscript was described in a recent exhibition catalogue as a “Commonplace book of manuscript English and Latin poetry and English prose”.¹² It is an octavo whose contents were copied down between the late 1580s and the 1610s. It includes works by Sir Philip Sidney, Sir Edward Dyer, Sir Walter Raleigh, the Earl of Oxford, and others. As far as Henry Constable is concerned, fifteen of his sonnets appear with the ascription “H.C.”, two of them not occurring anywhere else. While Black distinguishes three hands —A, B and C— and does not venture an identification of the compilers, Martin believes that the different handwriting styles are “the work of one scribe”.¹³ In any case, all of Constable’s sonnets preserved in this manuscript were copied in the exact same handwriting style and with the same quill. This means that 1588, mentioned as “this yeare” in the title of a sonnet to Penelope Rich’s newborn daughter, can be taken as the date in which they were all transcribed.¹⁴

The Harington MS (hereafter “H”), kept at Arundel Castle, is a large folio volume containing manuscript copies of Tudor poems. The miscellany was begun by John Harington of Stepney and continued by his son, Sir John Harington, a godson of Queen Elizabeth’s. Its contents include twenty-one sonnets by Constable under the heading “Mr. Henry Conestables sonetes to the Lady Ritche. 1589”. This heading, the first and second sonnets and lines 1-4 of the third were copied down by Sir John Harington; however, from the fifth line on —and up to the last sonnet— a different scribe took over and wrote in a different secretary hand and ink; this hand does not appear anywhere else in the collection. The date 1589 indicates, as Ruth Hughey points out, that “some of Constable’s sonnets were circulating in the late 1580’s”.¹⁵ There is little doubt that Sir John could have gained access to the poems from Constable himself. The two were certainly acquainted; in the notes to Book XXXIV of his translation of *Orlando Furioso*, Harington quotes one of Constable’s sonnets dedicated to James VI of Scotland, referring to the poet as “the well-learned Gentleman, and my very good frend M. Henry

¹² McCarthy and Sherwood-Smith, *The Fountain of Genius*.

¹³ Black, 15, and Martin, 36-8.

¹⁴ Martin, 22. The poem bears the heading ‘On y^e natiuitye of a yonge Ladye borne on a friday, in this yeare. 1588.’ Lady Penelope Rich, Sidney’s “Stella”, was an influential figure at court and Constable addressed a number of sonnets to her.

¹⁵ Hughey, 328.

Constable”.¹⁶ Although the sonnet arrangement varies, Harington’s collection contains essentially the same sonnets as the 1592 printed edition, which has led Kenneth Muir and others to believe in the existence of a lost source text from which both H and D92 derive.¹⁷ Hughey ventures that this lost manuscript (Y) could have been Constable’s own.¹⁸

Z, holding more sonnets than Y, might have been the base of MS Dyce 44, also known as the Todd MS, an early seventeenth century commonplace book preserved at the Victoria and Albert Museum, written in a consistent italic hand.¹⁹ It contains sixty-three sonnets by Constable whose thematic variety and defined arrangement, different from the one in the other sources, has led many authors to believe that “it is the closest thing we have to an authoritative text of Constable’s verse”, and even “his literary testament”.²⁰ The collection ends with a “conclusion of the whole” that, according to Grundy, is unequivocally Constable’s.²¹ The manuscript supplies title headings to Constable’s sonnets which could not have been copied down before the end of 1590, as Wickes has pointed out, although he thinks that “the sonnets themselves may have been written earlier”.²² Grundy argues that the author prepared this collection before he went into exile but there is no conclusive evidence supporting this claim.²³ Anyone who owned or obtained Z could have copied the sonnets in this book; however, it seems reasonable that this person was close to the poet in some degree, since they included a final sonnet “To H.C. upon occasion of leauing his countrye”, asking Constable to return from exile.²⁴

¹⁶ Harington, *Orlando Furioso*, 288. This is the sonnet “Where others hooded with blind loue do fly”. It is preserved in the Todd MS (see below) and as an introductory sonnet to James VI’s *Poeticall Exercises at vacant hours* (1591); in it, the poet praises James for his religious writings, which will give him everlasting fame.

¹⁷ Muir, 424.

¹⁸ Hughey, 329. For the sake of clarity, I will refer to this lost manuscript as “Y” henceforward.

¹⁹ It is known as the Todd MS, or Todd, because it was owned by Henry J. Todd in 1801.

²⁰ Wickes, “Henry Constable: Courtier Poet”, 103.

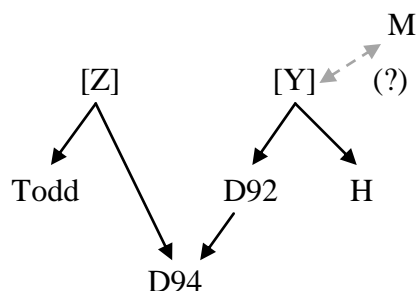
²¹ Grundy, 84. This conclusion, written from —or as if from— the author’s point of view, contains a renunciation of secular poetry. See below.

²² Wickes, “Henry Constable: Courtier Poet”, 106. One of the sonnets preserved only in Todd is titled “To the Countess of Shrewsbury”. It contains references to the name “Mary” that indicate that it was dedicated to Mary Talbot, who became Countess of Shrewsbury in November 1590. The heading must therefore have been written after this date.

²³ Grundy, 85.

²⁴ Concerning Z, John states: “The manuscript itself seems to be no longer in existence, but presumably the whole was a transcript with the order of arrangement coming originally from Constable’s own hand” (215).

Figure 1: Textual transmission hypothesis



The sonnet “Falslie doth enuie of your praises blame” is contained in all three manuscripts and the two printed collections. It appears in thirteenth place in D92, under the heading “Sonnetto tredici”; and it is “Sonnet VII” of the “first Decad” in D94.²⁵ It is the eighth, transcribed without a title, in M (f.26v), and the sixth in H (f.149r). The heading “Of the slander enuye giues him for so highlye praying his Mistrisse” precedes it in Todd, where it is the seventh in a subsection under the general title of “The second 7 of his Ladies prayse” (f.19r). Collation of the texts in the different sources is necessary in order to reach conclusions regarding the process of transmission and the semantic changes in this sonnet.

The text in the Marsh MS stands drastically apart from the rest for a number of reasons:

ffalse the report, & vniust is *the* blame
 that envye of your praise imputes to mee
 when it arreastes my penn of flatterye
 for honoring too muche thy sacred name
 5 And calls my tongue *the* partiall trompe of fame
 for saying that ther is no sunne but thee²⁶
 and eke would burne my hart for heresy
 sithe obstinate it doth beleve the same
 No, no, I flatter not when thee I call

²⁵ The Italian numbering of the sonnets in D92 seems “characteristic of Constable as a poet who travelled to Italy and used the Italian rhyme-scheme” (Fleissner, 81; see also Grundy, 94). D94 presents a unique arrangement of the sonnets, which are divided into eight “decades” of ten, the last being incomplete; in this edition, Constable’s sonnets are thrown in together with poems by contemporaries such as Sir Philip Sidney.

²⁶ “y^e” has been transcribed as “the”; “ptiall” in the manuscript has been expanded.

10 the sunne: the sunne was never suche
 but when the sunne thee I compar'd *with* all²⁷
 doubtlesse the sunne I flattered too muche
 and thoghe I erd, my hart cannot for this
 be burnt, for it already burned is

The poetic voice begins by defending himself from accusations of flattery that the envious direct at him whenever he extols his lady's beauty, comparing her to the sun in a conventional way. The first reference to the lady's name as "sacred" conveys an image of devotee-saint worship befitting the religion of love, one of the themes inherited from the courtly love tradition. In fact, the idea that excess in praising a lady venerated almost as a saint may prompt accusations of flattery can be found also in Petrarch's CCXLVII:

Parrà forse ad alcun che 'n lodar quella
 ch'i' adoro in terra, errante sia 'l mio stile,
 faccendo lei sovr'ogni altra gentile,
 santa, saggia, leggiadra, onesta et bella.²⁸ (ll.1-4)

Petrarch's sonnet moves towards a predictable conclusion, as the poet claims that despite its apparent exaggeration his praise is still unworthy and can never do justice to the divine character of his mistress. Constable, however, takes a more adventurous turn, as he builds on the theme of the religion of love (ll.7-8). The poet complains of the violent hatred of his detractors, who would persecute him and put him to death to silence him. As his allegedly misplaced devotion is interpreted as heresy, his obstinacy in adhering to his faith and giving testimony through his praise makes him liable to the punishment reserved for heretics: burning at the stake, an image that had a deep resonance in Elizabethan England, evoking the suffering of the Protestant martyrs under Queen Mary.

²⁷ Expanded from "the" and "wth".

²⁸ Translated by Musa as follows:

Someone perhaps may think, in praise of her
 whom I adore on earth, my style is wrong
 in making her beyond all others gracious,
 saintly and wise, charming and chaste and lovely.

Drayton, in *Ideas Mirrour*, XII, likewise, delves into this idea of flattery and the religion of love:

Some Athiest or vile Infidell in loue,
 When I doe speake of thy diuinitie,
 May blaspheme thus, and say, I flatter thee:
 And onely write, my skill in verse to proue. (ll.1-4)

In the following lines, the poet vindicates his innocence resorting, in true Petrarchan fashion, to further hyperbole: he protests that his praise is not exaggerated since it is the sun that pales in comparison with his lady (ll.9-12). He then concludes the sonnet with a witty turn. Even if he were in error, his heart could not be subjected to punishment by burning since it has already been consumed in the flames of love (ll.13-14).

The versions preserved in the other two manuscripts, as well as the two printed editions, are significantly different from M. The central argument that the poet is accused of flattery for sounding high praises of his mistress is unchanged, as is the poet's hyperbolic vindication that she far exceeds the sun in worth. But the motif of heresy and the powerful image of burning at the stake have been eliminated from the text. This is the sonnet as it appears in H:

ffalselie dothe envie of your prayes blame
my tounge my penn my heart of flatterie
because I sayd there was no sunn but thee
yt calld my tounge the partiall trumpe of fame
5 and sayth my penn hath flattered thy name
Because my penn did to my tounge agree
And that my heart must needs a flatterer be
which taught both tounge and and penn to say the same
no no I flatter not when thee I call
10 the sunn: sith that the sunn was neuer suche
but when the sunn thee I compared wthall
doubtles the sunn I flattered to muche
witnes myne eyes I say the truth in this
they haue seen thee and knowe that so yt ys

The opening of the sonnet in this version differs from M in dividing the blame assigned to the poet among three separate agents: his tongue, his pen, and his heart. The poet foregrounds this triad and reviews the accusations leveled against each, concluding that it is his heart that is made ultimately responsible for his offence since his love occasions all his praise. The three elements are not given such prominence in M; each of them is mentioned separately and only once. The emphasis on the triad tongue-pen-heart could have been first added in H (or, alternatively, Y) in order to give structural cohesion to a sonnet that had been deprived in revision of its central linking element: the image of the

lady as a saint, the charge of heresy and the ensuing punishment by fire. The comparison with the sun is maintained in the final part of the sonnet, but the disappearance of the image of burning forces a conclusion that is much weaker and more conventional than the one in M: the poet's eyes can testify that the lady is far more beautiful than the sun.

The texts in D92 and D94 are almost identical with H, differing only in spelling and punctuation. The version in T, however, though also very close to H, shows some variant readings that suggest a process of further revision:

Falselye doth envie of youre prayses blame
My tongue my pen my heart of flatterye
Because I sayd there was no sunne but thee
It call'd my tongue the partiall trumpe of fame
5 And sayd my pen had flattered thy name
Because my pen did to my tongue agree
And needs my heart a flatterer must be
Which taught both tongue and pen to say the same
No no I flatter not when I thee call
10 The sun: Sith sun in world was neuer such
But when the sun I thee compar'd wth all
Doubtlesse the sun I flattered to much
Witnesse myne eyes I say the truth is this
They haue thee seene and know that so it is

In H, lines 3-8, which recount the charges against the poet, present an alternation of verbal tenses: “sayd” (l.3), “calld” (l.4), “sayth” (l.5), “hath flattered” (l.5). The T text eliminates this variation, regularising the narrative; the present and present perfect verbs in line 5 are emended to past forms. Word order is also altered on several occasions, subtly correcting the rhythm of the verses: “when thee I call” in H (l.9) becomes “when I thee call” in Todd; pronouns are also inverted in line 11, and “they haue seen thee” in line 14 of the H version undergoes a similar transformation in the later manuscript version. Other changes eliminate empty grammatical words, strengthening semantic cohesion; thus, line 7 in H becomes in Todd “And needs my heart a flatterer must be”; and line 10, “the sunn: sith that the sunn was neuer suche”, is rendered as “The sun: Sith

sun in world was neuer such". All these variants aim at improving the verse, which suggests that the Todd text presents the last stage of revision of this sonnet.

The suppression of the image of the burning of the heretic is the central mystery in the process of textual transmission of this sonnet. Constable's editors have not found much to say on this subject. In his edition of D92, Fleissner ignores the M text and collates D92, D94, H and Todd, claiming that "the variant readings seem relatively inconsequential".²⁹ Grundy, in her 1960 edition of Constable's sonnets, presents the text as it appears in Todd but she quotes lines 1-8 and the final couplet from M in her footnotes, merely pointing out that M "has a different version".³⁰ Hughey states that "lines 7 and 10" in Todd "suggest a reviser's hand", and quotes the M version in full in her notes.³¹ The question remains of who—and why—revised this sonnet, producing a toned-down, poetically inferior poem. If we analyse the context of composition and transmission, a case can be made for both the author and his friend Sir John Harington, though Constable himself seems the more likely option.

The suppressed image was a heavily loaded one, both religious and politically. It evoked the worst horrors of Marian persecution. The hundreds of burnings at the stake during Mary Tudor's reign, Whitelock writes, "rather than extinguish Protestant sentiment, as Mary intended ... served only to define more clearly the Protestants as a dissident group".³² Persecution, moreover, prompted what Álvarez-Recio calls the "discourse of victimhood" which dominated Protestant literature in the time of Queen Mary and had a great influence in the Elizabethan period and beyond.³³ This is evidenced by the widespread popularity of John Foxe's *Actes and Monuments of these Latter and Perillous Dayes*, commonly known as *The Book of Martyrs* (1563), which transformed the martyrdom and death of Protestants during the Catholic regime into essential elements of the collective imagery of the English under the reign of Elizabeth. Catholic plots during the 1580s—such as Throckmorton's—roused anti-Catholic hysteria to its peak, and "Catholicism came to be defined as the primary evil afflicting

²⁹ Fleissner, 33, 64. Moreover, he argues that the H and Todd text could have been influenced by D94 (1980: 64). Both affirmations are clearly mistaken; an edition published in 1594 could not have possibly influenced the manuscript copy transcribed in 1589.

³⁰ Grundy, 129.

³¹ Hughey, 339.

³² Whitelock, 265.

³³ Álvarez-Recio, 43, 83.

the English people, with the regime's stability and the Queen's very life depending upon its eradication".³⁴

Constable's evocation of the burning of the heretics, a strongly anti-Catholic image, makes sense when read against this background. The poet himself, who had begun his public life in the early 1580s as a "gentleman-spokesman for the Protestant cause", must have participated in this climate of opinion.³⁵ At the time his sonnets were copied down in M, in 1588, there is no evidence whatsoever of his being other than a staunch Protestant. In this crucial year, marked by the Armada crisis, the identification he invites between the image of the persecuted poet and that of the Protestant martyr inevitably carries both a note of denunciation of Catholic intolerance and of celebration of Protestant steadfastness in the face of adversity.

However, Constable's position in matters of religion was to alter. In 1589, his pamphlet entitled *Examen Pacifique de la Doctrine des Huguenots* was published anonymously. According to Rogers, it "was written in the context of the controversy over the succession of a Protestant to the throne of France", and inspired by the events Constable had witnessed during his stay in Paris.³⁶ In this tract, Constable adopts a Catholic persona and argues for the reconciliation of the Catholic and Protestant churches, advocating toleration. Its main purpose, from the religious point of view, was to plead for a conference in which both sides should discard their prejudices, and "in that Conference make discovery of the Truth, and by discovery of the Truth, establish a peace in the Church of God".³⁷ Scholars do not agree whether Constable had converted by the time this work was published.³⁸ George Wickes affirms that it is a "pro-Catholic treatise" whereas David Rogers sees it as the product of "the state of mind of a near-convert, seeking ... to convince his own intellect that the cleavage between Huguenot and Catholic was only based on misunderstanding after all".³⁹

Some authors have pointed out that certain friends of Constable at that time —such as Jean Hotman, secretary to the late Earl of Leicester— turned from Calvinism to

³⁴ Ibid., 103-4.

³⁵ Sullivan, "Constable, Henry (1562–1613)".

³⁶ Rogers, 228, 232. In 1623 an English version was published under the title *The Catholike Moderator*.

³⁷ Constable, *The Catholike Moderator*, A1v.

³⁸ In 1597 Constable was referred to in a letter as an English gentleman who had converted to Catholicism eight years before, that is, in 1589. It was written by the secretary of the Apostolic Delegate to France, Atilio Amalteo, to Cardinal Pietro Aldobrandini. Wickes quotes a fragment of the letter in Italian and provides a translation ("Henry Constable, Poet and Courtier, 1562-1613", 276, 296).

³⁹ Wickes, "Henry Constable: Courtier Poet", 275, and Rogers, 229.

irenicism, a politically meaningful, ecumenicist religious movement that attempted “to evade frightening religious antagonisms which had led to calamities like the civil wars in France”.⁴⁰ Evidence that Constable was moving towards similar positions is found in some sonnets which are unique to the Todd MS and introduce ambiguous religious statements.⁴¹ There is also a “conclusion of the whole” in this manuscript collection, which Parker has interpreted as a “renunciation of secular love” written by Constable himself.⁴² In any case, it can be understood as a turning point in his literary career, since he only wrote religious poetry after his exile:

When I had ended this last sonet and found that such vayne poems as I had by idle houres writ did amounte iust to the climatericall number 63. me thought it was high tyme for my follie to die and to employe the remnant of wit to other calmer thoughts lesse sweete and less bitter. (42v)

By the end of 1590, as Grundy argues, “Constable’s secular sonnets were probably all written” and he was already a Catholic, although he remained in England for some time after his change of faith.⁴³ Roche has stated that “no matter what his own religious beliefs were, [Constable] was an advocate of the *via media* that he himself predicted as the way to reconciliation of the churches”.⁴⁴ In 1597, Constable wrote to the Earl of Essex from Paris:

I have publicly protested my lawful affection to my country among those with whom I live, and have written to Rome to dissuade the Pope from giving credit to those who would have English Catholics favour the King of Spain's designs against the Queen. This is the desire of most of my Catholic countrymen at Rome, and also of the bearer of this letter, who came hither to communicate with me on this matter, and to suggest that those of my condition should by oath oppose ourselves against all violent proceedings for religion.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Haynes, 78.

⁴¹ “To the Queene touching the cruell effects of her perfections” (23v) makes use of the controversial concept of Purgatory by explaining how the Queen’s beauty and glory leads men to sin and fall in Purgatory instead of hell, where angels punish their souls. Another sonnet is dedicated to Mary Talbot, Countess of Shrewsbury, who was a Catholic (27r).

⁴² Parker, 160.

⁴³ Grundy, 34.

⁴⁴ Roche, 326.

⁴⁵ Roberts, “Cecil Papers: February 1597”, 16-28.

Taking all this into account, it makes sense that Constable himself should have rewritten the sonnet under discussion at some point in 1589, when his interest in theological matters deepened and he decided to advocate irenicism first, and later Catholicism. The strong anti-Catholic undertones in the image of “burning” would have troubled him once this transformation occurred, so he might have revised his sonnet, producing a less controversial version, and copied it in Y, or the copy-text from which Y was transcribed; from this source, it would have passed into both D92 and H.

There is still another possibility: the changes might have been introduced by Sir John Harington, who also “had a strong leaning towards Catholicism”.⁴⁶ Scott-Warren has hypothesised that he planned to present copies of his *New Discourse* (1596) to four prominent Catholics.⁴⁷ In 1602, Harington wrote his *A Tract on the Succession to the Crown*. In this work, he addressed Protestants, Puritans and Catholics arguing that the union of England and Scotland under James VI was desirable, religious differences notwithstanding. In chapter V, after referring to the accession of a Catholic monarch after Edward VI and of a Protestant one after Mary I, a number of pages are devoted to his own translation of Constable’s *Examen pacifique*, of whose author he says: “...the Catholique author whome I mean to cite in this matter must I cite without a name, yet I have heard some say hee is Constable in Fraunce”.⁴⁸ The only surviving copy of the *Tract* was given to Tobie Matthew, Archbishop York until 1628, who made marginal annotations such as the one beside the mysterious “Constable in France” reference: “yet he meaneth Henry Constable the travelour”. Later, Harington adds: “Out of this French author ... I shewe you the very paterne of a learned, modest and moderate Catholique, that professes not to labour for victory but for veritie, and advises not to oppose man’s presumption against God’s providence”.⁴⁹ He certainly knew who the author of the pamphlet was, and attempted to mask his identity in order to avoid being linked to a friend in disgrace, which would bring Harington under suspicion of maintaining

⁴⁶ Scott-Warren, “Harington, Sir John (bap. 1560, d. 1612)”.

⁴⁷ Scott-Warren, *Sir John Harington and the Book as a Gift*, 95. *A New Discourse of a Stale Subject, Called the Metamorphosis of Ajax*, was first published in 1596, and in the final section of the book, the “Apologie”, “he created a complex fictional vehicle which allowed him to flatter potential patrons and to promote the toleration of conformist recusants such as his friend Ralph Sheldon and his uncle Thomas Markham” (Scott-Warren 2004)

⁴⁸ Harington, *A Tract on the Succession*, 64. Harington’s is the second translation of excerpts from the *Examen pacifique* into English we have, written twenty-one years before the publication of *The Catholike Moderator*. The first was handwritten in York Minster MS XVI by a scribe working for Tobie Matthew, under the title “A peaceable Survieue & Examination of the Doctrine of the Huguenottes” (Scott-Warren 2001: 163). Both translations differ.

⁴⁹ Harington, *A Tract on the Succession*, 70-1.

Catholic connections. However, Harington translated from this tract in order to endorse his own views on religious toleration.

Whatever his inner convictions might have been, Sir John attempted to resist any labels. On various occasions throughout his works, for instance in the introduction to his *Tract*, he declares himself to be a “Protesting Catholique, Purytan”.⁵⁰ Three of Harington’s epigrams are preserved in the Papers of the recusant Sir Thomas Tresham (1543-1605); one of them, dated 16 July 1603, is titled “Of a hangman” and is subversive in its lamentation of the execution of Mary Queen of Scots, ending with a reflection that allows for two readings, one of them a criticism on Elizabeth I: “Graunt Lord that in this noble Ile a quene / Without a head maye neuer more be seene” (ll.13-14).⁵¹ Another of these epigrams contains a theological debate so acute that corrections have been added to its final couplet in the Folger MS V.a.249 version (1605). A father and son discuss which the “sounder Church” is (l.4), and the son reaches this conclusion:

Sure (quoth the sonne) a man had neede be crafty
to keepe his soule and body both in saf^{ty}.
But both to save, this is best way to hold
live in the new, dye if you can in th’ old.⁵² (ll.11-14)

The last line is “crudely emended” (Scott-Warren 2001: 212): “die in the new, live if you list in th’ old”.⁵³ Kilroy points out that “this text ... will never be settled”.⁵⁴

In chapter VIII of the aforementioned *Tract*, Harington makes a stand for toleration and calls for an end to executions:

Experience hath taught that neither the burning used in Queen Marie’s tyme, nor the hanging used in this tyme, nor both used in King Henrie’s tyme, did any good at all. ... The sworde is no good decider of questions in religion.⁵⁵

Kilroy considers the *Tract* “an eirenic document clearly intended to influence the attitude of the new King”, and the author himself a man who made continuous attempts

⁵⁰ Ibid., 3.

⁵¹ BL. Add. MS 39829, fol. 93r (quoted in Kilroy, 133).

⁵² Kilroy, 105.

⁵³ According to the Folger Library online catalogue, V.a.249 contains 409 epigrams “in an italic scribal hand... with Harington’s autograph revisions and punctuation in a darker ink”.

⁵⁴ Kilroy, 105.

⁵⁵ Harington, *A Tract on the Succession*, 109.

to “obtain some mitigation in the rigour with which Catholics were treated”.⁵⁶ All this being taken into account, it is reasonable to believe that, if Harington did obtain a copy of the poem as it appears in the Marsh MS, he would have wanted to moderate its content and introduce changes, eliminating the strong anti-Catholic undertones.

The sonnet “ffalse the report, & vniust is *the* blame”, as preserved in the Marsh MS, is so removed from the subsequent versions in H, D92 and ultimately Todd, that none of the main variants seem accidental. In the process of transmission the sonnet was clearly revised to expunge the problematic central image, and was transformed into a pretty harmless, aseptic sonnet of flattery. Both Constable and his friend Harington could have introduced the corrections. However, the fact that the revised sonnet appears also in the printed *Diana* and Todd, which were probably supervised by Constable, suggests that even if he were not responsible for the alterations, he certainly sanctioned the new version. It may seem paradoxical to argue that an author would rewrite one of his compositions to turn it conscientiously into a poorer poem. Yet, in this particular case, Constable’s change of position lends validity to the hypothesis; the sonnet had to undergo a process of transformation commensurate with his own evolution. Editors of Renaissance texts often claim fidelity to an author’s original intention. When working on the verse of Henry Constable, however, they would do well to remember that he was a man who, as Stockard puts it, “held different intentions at different times” (1994).

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⁵⁶ Kilroy, 118-9. “Irenicism” and “eirenism” are used interchangeably as opposed to religious confrontation or polemicism.

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