

# Towards a New Poetics of Puritanism: Edward Taylor's *Preparatory Meditations*

---

MIN-HUA WU

**Abstract:** Heirs of the Renaissance, the Puritans valued the ancient classics, esteemed such moderns as Spenser, Sidney, and later Milton, and of course were in sympathy with the Renaissance belief in the ethical foundation of poetry. With such a tradition behind them, and living intensely in the present, they had a situation favorable to a high order of religious poetry. While occupied with the practical demands of early settlement in the colonial wilderness of North America, the Puritans observed an austere religion founded on the Biblical notion of the original sin. As a 17<sup>th</sup>-century American Metaphysical poet, Edward Taylor fuses thought and feeling with fresh and tense language. The research attempts to study how Taylor combines the religious meditational traditions and Biblical typology, a conservative sense of parallels between the *Old Testament* and the *New Testament*, in his religious poetry, *Preparatory Meditations*. I argue that Edward Taylor, the pastor and poet, draws on verbal piety as revealed in the universe of his religious poetry to reassert the union of Godhead and manhood in the Word. Besides, Metaphysical wit serves as a delight for the daily life surrounded by dangers and wilderness in North America during early colonial period. Thus, as Hephaestus forges a brave shield for Achilles under the supplication of Thetis, so does Edward Taylor as a pastor-poet forge a new poetics of Puritanism out of colonial barrenness, one that fuses Biblical typology and lyrical poetry.

**Keywords:** Edward Taylor, *Preparatory Meditations*, Puritanism, Poetics, American colonial period, Anne Bradstreet, Typology, Metaphysical wit, early American literature, religious poetry

My Glorious Lord thy work upon my hand  
A work so greate and doth so Ample grow  
Too larg to be by my Souls limits spand.  
Lord let me to thy Angell Palace goe  
To borrow thence Angelick Organs bright.  
To play thy praises with theses pipes aright.

You Holy Angells lend yee mee your Skill.  
Your Organs set and fill them up well stuf  
With Christs rich praises whose lips do distill  
Upon his Spouse such ravishing dewes to gust  
With Silver Metaphors and Tropes bedlight.  
How fair, how pleasant art, Love, for delight?

Which Rhetorick of thine my Lord descry  
Such influences from thy Spouses face  
That do upon me run and raise thy Joy  
Above my narrow Fancy to uncase.

But yet demands my praise so high, so much  
The which my narrow pipe can neer tune such.

Hence I come to your doors bright Starrs on high  
And beg you to imply your pipes herein.  
Winde musick makes the Sweetest Melody.  
I'le with my little pipe thy praises sing.  
Accept I pray and what for this I borrow,  
I'le pay thee more when rise on heavens morrow.

(*Preparatory Meditations* 2.153)

Heirs of the Renaissance, the Puritans valued the ancient classics, esteemed such moderns as Spenser, Sidney, and later Milton, and of course were in sympathy with the Renaissance belief in the ethical foundation of poetry. With such a tradition behind them, and living intensely in the present, they had, it would seem to be, a situation favorable to a high order of religious poetry. For their failure to publish a body of epic and lyric poetry, one must look for reasons other than religious hostility, as towards theater and play in the Elizabethan period. In point of fact, one reason has already been suggested: they were excessively absorbed in and utterly occupied with the practical demands of early settlement in the colonial wilderness of North America. At the same time, they were too occupied in vigilantly observing an austere religion, which made them fearful of the dangers latent in the senses and passions that poetry may tend to cultivate, as proposed by Plato in his renowned classic of philosophical studies, *The Republic*. Besides, in their zealous pursuit for solid substance of thought, they tended to undervalue the ultimate pursuit for aesthetic expression. By the same token, the Puritan settlers by and large lacked sufficient familiarity with traditional literary arts to which they had difficulty finding appropriate access in the wilderness of North America during the early colonial period. In light of aesthetics and poetic experiment, the overall impression of Puritan literary endeavors in the seventeenth century in North America during the colonial period appears to suffer some sort of deficiency or unsophisticatedness as far as aesthetics and poetics are concerned.

Without a doubt, the early settlers made an ominous and unhealthy beginning in terms of literary adventures as well as poetic engagement. For instance, in the *Bay Psalm Book*, three ministers joined in a literal translation of the Psalms of the Bible, which was not even intended to be poetry at all but rather to be religious material in itself. That is to say, the Psalms of the Bible were rendered with a deliberate purpose to be adjusted to the tunes sung in the churches in order to serve religious rituals and practices. As a result, the subordination of the Puritans' poetry's aesthetic quality to the doctrine of melody and musicology that serves the needs of religious gatherings appears to be somehow striking. The exploitation of poetic artistry and obsession with doctrinal juxtaposition manifests itself in the best-sellers of Puritan verse. For example, Michael Wigglesworth's "The Day of Doom: or, A Poetical Description of the Great and Last Judgment" became a best-selling classic in Puritan New England for almost a century after it was first published in 1662 by Samuel Green and Marmaduke Johnson. Although it is not devoid of poetic power and prosodic merits, on the whole it is little more than versified Calvinism which the pious churchgoers could readily learn by heart because of its frequent textual allusions to the Christian scriptures with which the Puritans were so familiar. On the other hand, as for Anne Bradstreet, it is generally admitted that there are vastly more poetic merits in her literary attempts. Although she was largely given to imitating her literary and poetic models in the old world, that is, the British poets on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, she had an effectively simple way of her own female as well as domestic poetics that characterizes a convergence of natural life and religious belief during the colonial period in North America. The reader can see that she was capable of a free genuine expression, though she refrained herself from going beyond the limits set by the standard of social decorum in her individual poetic adventures.

Undeniably, the one poet who plainly emerges above the rest of the Puritans during the early colonial period is no other than Edward Taylor (c. 1642–1729), who published only a little in his lifetime but left in his manuscripts a large collection of verse virtually unknown till the twentieth century. He is a 17<sup>th</sup>-century American Metaphysical poet, whose poetry features “bold metaphysical juxtaposition of thought and image” (Brumm 1972, 192), which in a lot of respects is reminiscent of John Donne, Richard Crashaw, and even some other English poets of the time. Through fresh and tense language which magically and creatively fuses thought as well as feeling, Edward Taylor’s Puritan religious poetry showed that it could “not only be devout in its orthodox substance,” but it could also be “vigorous, passionate, and sometimes even ecstatic in its expression” (Foerster 15). As far as meditational tradition is concerned, private meditational poetry was not originally designed for audience other than God Himself. As such, the poet who was engaged in religious contemplations was apparently prevalent in early colonial New England. For instance, in “Contemplations,” Anne Bradstreet (1612–1772) made use of public conventional emblems and well-known biblical stories to reshape the public features of her materials into a very personal and original meditation on the conflict within herself between pride and humility. Emblems in verse—epigrammatic observations on a picture depicting an idea—appealed to Puritan poets, especially in private poems similar to “Contemplations,” in which Bradstreet speaks of a flowing river as “Thou Emblem true, of what I count the best, / O could I lead my Rivolets to rest, / So may we press to that vast mansion, ever blest” (Bradstreet “Contemplations,” stanza 23).

Just how ingenious a Puritan poet could be in the creation of emblems is evident in the private meditations of Edward Taylor. Far from demonstrating derivativeness or the exhaustion of the emblem tradition, Taylor’s poems often reveal a startling capacity to generate innovative emblems. In “Meditation 1.8,” for example, the poet interrelates macrocosm and microcosm through a series of parallel emblems: the picture of a downed birdlike soul in a cage-like body, which becomes the picture of a starving creature unable to reach the crumb-like stars at the “bottom” of the barrel-like heavens, which becomes the picture of a potential saint being nourished by an overflow from God’s bowels in the inverted crystal meal bowl of the starry heavens. Likewise, in “Meditation 2.3” Taylor uses his own face as an emblem; it is described in detail as if it were a natural terrain characterized by topography, climate, flora, and fauna, namely natural elements found on the native land and wilderness of North America during early colonial settlement.

This liveliness of the emblem tradition is only one feature of the abundant artistic creativity evident in Edward Taylor’s religious poetry. Taylor’s current reputation, however, derives from 20<sup>th</sup>-century critics’ high regard and evaluation for his *Preparatory Meditations*, more than two hundred private poems he wrote in two series and in apparent conjunction with certain of the religious sermons that he consciously and conscientiously prepares for his flock during church gatherings. Exhibiting the meditational traditions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, these devotional poems were written in preparation for Taylor’s administration of the Lord’s Supper, although evidence indicates that several of these works were occasional poems and that he revised and recast a number of the poems at later times.<sup>1</sup> Several of them can be grouped into clusters; for example, in the Second Series, “Meditation 1” to “Meditation 30” concern biblical typology and “Meditation 115” to “Meditation 133” concern the allegory of Canticles.

Besides meditational traditions and biblical typology and allegory, these poems also reflect the verbal ingenuity of seventeenth-century English “metaphysical” poetry. They are none the less far from being merely derivative works. Among their idiosyncratic poetic features departing from the prosodic examples established by the British “metaphysical” poets rests a deliberately executed decorum of imperfection. That is to say, the poet tends to limit and confine himself to ineffectual amplification when he speaks of God. To put it another way, when the poet addresses to God, he tends to engage in a well-managed rhetoric that imposes self-diminishment upon the poet himself. When the pastor and poet is engaged in describing himself or the postlapsarian humanity as a

whole, Biblical implications tend to overflow onto the stanzas. Besides, in contrast to George Herbert (1593–1633), English metaphysical poet and clergyman, whose poems, collected in *The Temple*, express a sweet and trusting friendliness with God, Edward Taylor's poems reveal his adherence to an exclusionist typological system—a conservative sense of parallels between the *Old Testament* and the *New Testament*. Both the *Old Testament* and the *New Testament* are essentially completed with Jesus Christ and so do not centrally include the saint, who at best is a peripheral participant in the typological scheme.

In addition, with an ambivalence characteristic of the Puritan belief and culture, Edward Taylor departs from the poetic examples well established by the British “metaphysical” poets of the old world in Great Britain. That is, the pastor-poet tends to precariously balance the assertion of poetic self and the abrogation of this assertion, so much so that the poet is curiously within and outside his poem he is writing at the same time. In other words, Taylor manages the tension between cultural, theological restraints and personal emotion by creating through a pyrotechnic use of verbal nuance a liminal space between despair and presumption. As such it is appropriate for him to tend to conclude his meditation uncertainly in the subjunctive mode, that is to say, in petition rather than in resolution in front of God the Almighty. Most of the time, Taylor's poems manifest a verbal ingenuity designed to attract the attention of God to the underlying potentiality of the childlike poet's “Lisp of Non-sense,” so much so that God, the omniscient and the omnipotent, will transform the postlapsarian lisp through grace and make the poet an adopted child capable of singing God's praise in genuinely adroit poetry.

Initial interests in Edward Taylor's *Preparatory Meditations* emphasized theme, theology, intellectual heritage and aesthetic theory. These interpretive concerns continue to be of great interest in our times, although the exuberant as well as pyrotechnical imagery in Edward Taylor's poetic enterprise tends to elude precise critical categorization and understanding. Generally speaking, the imagery in Taylor's verse is thought to reflect a “baroque” (Keller 1975, 161–188) and free-associative literary and poetic style. The Baroque style used contrast, movement, exuberant detail, deep colour, grandeur, and surprise to achieve a sense of awe in front of imperative divine power. The style began at the start of the 17<sup>th</sup> century in Rome; then, it spread rapidly to France, northern Italy, Spain, and Portugal; lastly, the style was disseminated to as far as Austria, southern Germany, and Russia. By the 1730s, it had evolved into an even more flamboyant style, called *rocaille* or *Rococo*, which appeared in France and Central Europe until the mid to late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Edward Taylor draws on such a highly decorative style in his poetic attempts to bring about a whole new world in the wild nature of North America during the early colonial period. The subtle and nuanced convergence of the twain, namely the “baroque” style as the formal expression and the natural “wilderness” of North America as the fundamental concern and content of the poetry, leads Huang Chung-Ying to dub Edward Taylor's poetic style as “wilderness baroque” (Huang 36).

However, such a notion of “wilderness baroque” is sometimes compromised or counterbalanced by the exemplary meditations, in which Edward Taylor manages to conjure up an intricate artistic integrity, a developmental consistency of imagery, and a logical pattern of transition based on aesthetics, theology, and science. Take “Meditation 2.10” for example. Taylor easily blends together Biblical typology and 17<sup>th</sup>-century scientific data on comets to demonstrate divine harmony between the will of God high up in Heaven and the phenomena down here in of the mundane world on earth. By the same token, Taylor's abundant references in “Meditation 2.26” to specific herbs are far from being gratuitous or random; on the contrary, they contribute to forming an underlying pattern informed by a reiterated tripartite progression from purgation, through improving health, to regeneration in the end. In a like manner, the apparently random shifting from image to image in “Meditation 2.25” actually evinces an underlying unity derived from the traditions of Biblical exegesis typical of the poet's times. Also, in “Meditation 1.39” the proliferation of Taylor's imagery appears to be rather baroque and free-associative, yet actually it suggests a se-

quential narrative plot as a whole: That the sick poet is in urgent need of Jesus Christ the Physician to cure him. In a similar timbre, the poet appeals to Christ the Advocate to plead his case for the transgressions committed by the poet's animal passions during his time of illness. When occasions arise, the poet invokes Jesus Christ the Blacksmith to forge through the crucifixion "Nails made of heavenly Steel, more Choice than gold / Drove home, Well Clencht," so as to pen and curb the animal passions of the poet's carnal body for good. More often than not, in *Preparatory Meditations* these transitions involving elements of aesthetics, theology, and science are elliptical and elusive as a result of the personal associations—be they biographical, social, or doctrinal—in Edward Taylor's highly metaphysical poetry that attends to both heavenly divinity and earthly humanity.

On the other hand, the heart or will of the humankind remains at the center of Edward Taylor's *Preparatory Meditations*.<sup>2</sup> Taylor turned to the universe of poetry because it was private and allowed him to concentrate less on the logic of rational comprehension and more on the affectional dimensions of the human heart. In the verbal world of poetry, one might speculate that the colonial American poet, pastor and physician of English origin might find release from the confining discipline of public sermons that he had to administer for his flock at church gatherings. At the very least, the universe of poesy doubtless provided the devoted Puritan pastor with an opportunity and a stint to delve into the question of his very own salvation at the heavenly court of the final judgement. As textually showcased in the *Preparatory Meditations*, Taylor's pent-up, heartfelt feelings tended to overflow into his restraining rhetorical structures, and even occasionally onto the meter and rhyme of his well-crafted stanzas. Of course, Taylor never totally abandoned reason and ration in his poetic undertaking. For the American poet of early colonial period, rationality *per se* comprises part of the inherent nature of words. What's more, the poet did take to exercising rational restraint, perhaps in imitation of the underlying rational order of the Word's poetic genesis of the universe by the divine God, through the confining discipline of stanzaic form, meter, and rhyme.

Nevertheless, it was for its capacity to convey his deep love of God that drives Edward Taylor the Puritan pastor-poet to write his religious sermons in the form of poetry. In this particular mode of literary expression, he sought "To tend [the] Lord in all admiring Style" (Taylor 1960, 1.41). Such a style, hopefully arising from a heart responding to grace, would communicate his deepest love for the divine power in Heaven. Because the "Magnificence of the Author is blessed by his Works," Taylor engaged himself in the expression of the self in his pious poetry by means of some reflections, albeit obscure at times, of the spiritual condition of his very own soul. Without the grace and favor of timely divinity, the "Quaint Metaphors" and "Sparkling Eloquence" of his poetic devotion to God indeed "would appear as dawbing pearls with mud" (Taylor 1960, 1.13). In stark contrast, were the poet animated by the Word's inspiring art, he would more readily approximate, though never fully achieve in this human world, a poetic style that mirrors this divine Love—an "all admiring Style" embraced by the pastor and poet of Puritanism. As such, his poetic attempts, no longer "dawbing pearls with mud," would imitate the artistry of the Word: "A heap of Pearls is precious: but they shall / When set by Art Excel" (Taylor 1960, 1.19).

On the other hand, it is evident that the meditative structure permitted the poet to dwell on his beloved theme of Love. Since this system of personal piety was to elicit the movement of the will, it was necessarily suited to the expression of love, namely human heart's chief affection. As a matter of fact, according to the Salesian spirit of meditation, which differs from the Jesuit spirit in degree of intellectuality and emotional tumult, the language of pious contemplation was to originate in the heart's love which it reflects. Without a doubt, religious meditations as spiritual sources speak volumes for Edward Taylor's sacred creation of poetry although his sacred creation of poetry was founded on the natural landscape as well as secular human world on earth during a time of primitive environment.

In the wake of the Salesian meditation, Edward Taylor modified the traditional meditative climax, wherein by means of the aroused will, the entire soul "is lifted up to speak with God in

sacred colloquy and to hear God speak to man in turn" (Martz 145–47). As such, in its entirety each poem of the *Preparatory Meditations* represents Taylor's spiritual and verbal conversation with God the Almighty, but nowhere in these poems does God Himself speak directly to the poet. Taylor believed that God's communication to His elect is continuous and that, in response to his grace, the very language of the saint's own heart reflects the artistry of the Logos/Word; for, the will of the saint is the musical instrument God plays in praise of Himself. In other words, Taylor looked to his own art for a sign of God's voice to himself. As a result, many of his poems open with a search for words end up communicating the active desire of the poet's will to be the passive recipient of grace from God.

Consequently, Edward Taylor as a Puritan pastor and poet perceived a real correspondence between human words and the divine Word. Just as the Word itself mediates between God and man, man's words on earth in response to grace can somehow manage to mediate, through the divine power of the Word, between mankind and God:

Thou art my Medium to God, Thou art  
My Medium of Worship done to thee,  
And of Divine Communion, Sweet heart!  
Oh Heavenly intercourse! (Taylor 1960, 2.20)

When they are motivated by divine grace and when they reflect and are offered the grace of Jesus Christ, in whom Godhead and manhood are eternally united, man's pious words provide a middle point, at which, in a figurative sense, God and man meet in a medium of mutual love between each other.

In other words, Edward Taylor saw the pious language of the heart as a verbal suspension between man and God. Words communicate the heart's love, and since thought and action are equivalent to language, words provide in a sense the only means whereby a man can express himself to God. Accordingly, "Such *verbal piety* reasserts the union of Godhead and manhood in the Word" (Scheick 125, emphasizes mine), as expressed in the first two stanzas of *Preparatory Meditations*:

My Blessed Lord, that Golden Linck that joyns  
My Soule, and thee, outblossoms on't this Spruce  
Pearl Pronown My more spirituouse than wines,  
Rooted in Rich Relation, Graces Sluce.  
This little Voice feast mee with fatter Sweets  
Than all the Stars that pave the Heavens Streets.  
It hands me All, my heart, and hand to thee  
And up doth lodge them in thy persons Lodge  
And as a Golden bridge ore it to mee  
Thee, and thine All to me, and never dodge.  
In this small Ship a mutual Intrest sayles  
From Heaven and Earth, by th'holy Spirits gales.

(Taylor 1960, 2.35)

It was through the poetic expression of his Puritan beliefs that Edward Taylor, pastor and poet of Jesus Christ, endeavored to tend his Lord "in all admiring Style." In his ability to manifest his poetic aims, especially in the realization of a stylistic integration of the sublime and the ordinary, lay the evidence of his salvation. Since words are derived from the will, a converted heart will spawn a certain degree of gracious verbal eloquence based not on superficial rhetoric but on the radical meaning beneath all rhetoric, on the integrating presence of divine love both in the soul and in the world. It is Taylor's effort to discern the spiritual state of his will through the looking Glass of his poetic stuttering utterances, which inform the dramatic sense of anxiety one feels in his religious meditations. Admittedly, the words in Taylor's religious and poetic meditations are themselves no other than events, uncertain events which motivated Taylor, in spite of his unrelenting effort to

express his love in pious poetry, to keep the quest and questioning of his spiritual condition suspended. He never permitted himself to cross the verbal bridge of his meditations in order to arrive at complete spiritual resolution or mystical assurance. On the contrary, Taylor keeps inscribing his “in-scape” (Reiter 173)—that is to say, “his heartfelt, personal narrative of an ingrained faith and an unwavering devotion” (Scheick 168). As a result, Taylor was able to achieve the very difficult mission of his religious quest, namely to make a successful poem out of Biblical typology in the vast wilderness of North America.

For Edward Taylor the devoted pastor and creative poet, the types of the *Old Testament*—persons, things, and events—are signs, often glorious signs in themselves, which are surpassed, overshadowed, excelled, and sometimes even abrogated, by that which they typify or signify. “For the Type is but the Signum of the Antitype,” as he elucidates in *Upon the Types of the Old Testament*:

Because of the Relation that there is between the Type, & Christ they are Relates. the [*sic*] relation is that of a Sign, & the thing Signified, for the Type is a Sign: & Christ or Something of Christ in the thing Typified, or Signified: If the Relation be removed then it comes to this that the nature of a Sign Ceases: and the type is no more than another thing. But now seeing the matter is thus Christ doth transcendently excel the Type. For the Excellency of the thing Signified doth thus excel the Sign. The Sign of the Sun is not comparable to the Sun itselfe. The Garland & Tuns that signifie Wine to be Sold not to the wine. (Taylor 1990, 9)

In other words, in Taylor’s religious world, “types are drafts, lineaments, sketches, drawings, and ‘Shadows of Christ’” (Munk 91). As Taylor explains to his parishioners: “Some take the Word Shadow, to be an allusion to the first draught of a Picture which is pensild out with a Coale, or black Lead, & as such is called the Shadow: but after its completed with fair Colours” (Taylor 1990, 5). Adam, “drawn out to the very Image of God . . . was the Completest Portraiture, & Resemblance of Christ that ever the Finger of God did pencil out” (Taylor 1990, 44). Noah too is a type of Christ, who “as to Name & reason of its application stands as it were in Print upon Noah as to his Name” (Taylor 1990, 46). By the same token, Joseph “bears a draught of Christ Pensild out upon him” (Taylor 1990, 115) whereas Jesus Christ Himself is “emblemized or typified by Moses. Hence Moses is drawn out by Gods own Finger, as a Sampar wherein Christ is drawn in bright Colours” (Taylor 1990, 135).

Following the well-established typological exegesis, “Puritanism seems to have been doomed to ‘negative theology,’ as Carol Bensick dubs in “Preaching to the Choir: Some Achievements and Shortcomings of Taylor’s *God’s Determinations*” (Bensick 140). If one reads Taylor’s Preface to *God’s Determinations* carefully, he or she will find that question marks abound between the lines of the entire text. The eighteen question marks within forty-four lines seem to reveal Taylor’s repetition compulsion,<sup>3</sup> which to some extent sheds light on the Puritan obsession with God’s perfection and man’s depravity (Bensick 142; Brumm 1972, 205). In stark contrast to *God’s Determinations*, Taylor wrote his *Preparatory Meditations* out of the motive of personal hope, joy, and despair. These poems, written for Taylor’s own individual pleasure and never a part of actual religious service at church gatherings, followed upon his preparation for a sermon to be delivered at monthly communion. They gave the poet an occasion to summarize the emotional and intellectual content of his sermon and to speak directly and fervently to God the Almighty in private (Baym 174). The aftermath of the Tayloristic personal lyric release within panoramic religious confessions is what Jeffrey Hammond calls an articulation of “extrapersonal religious tradition with an intensely personal faith” (367). As a consequence, the eschatological gloom and/or Calvinist grim as revealed in Edward Taylor’s *God’s Determinations* turns out to be somewhat saturated with delightful faith as well as Metaphysical wit in the literary creation of his *Preparatory Meditations*.

In terms of actual primitive life led and experienced by the early colonizers from Europe and Great Britain, the writing of poetry does bear great significances as it provides them with timely relief from endless daily struggles of survival. Even though there was much about congregational

Calvinism that should have denied to the Puritan writer the services of wit, the theology and the new life in the colonies demanded it. As both a pastor and a poet, Edward Taylor needs a particular mode of expression for his spiritual delights. Of these delights Perry Miller writes: "Living was a serious business, and those who took it gaily here would come to reckoning hereafter. What is supportable to them was not the incidental amusements along the way but the one *engrossing joy of the saints' communion with the God* who had made them and had redeemed them" (qtd. in Keller 165, my italics). Under this special circumstance, the need in metaphysical wit served a different purpose in New England during early colonial period. In the Calvinist's view of the mundane world as a hard and dark condition for human creatures on earth, there were few pleasures for the human subjects to resort to in the postlapsarian world of suffering. A humble wit was, however, one safe pleasure, not one of much significance to be sure. Nonetheless, it serves as one safe human pleasure which could help a writer keep his chin up, express his delight, and catch his fleeting negligible ecstasies in the barren wilderness surrounding colonial North America.

In the consciousness of Edward Taylor's, or any other Puritan poet's, afflictions, the fleeting pleasure of Metaphysical wit helped him bear his cross with less pain or drabness. This special human condition during early colonial period in North America applies as well to the poetic undertaking of Anne Bradstreet, another important American writer of the early colonial period. For the female poet, life itself provided human beings with "toys." That is, for someone fascinated with literature and the uses of language, metaphysical wit might be considered to be one of life's more serviceable toys in the wilderness that surrounds the early colonies in North America. Once one took time to play with it and he or she is sure to be cheered a little in the darkness or barrenness of civilization of the time. Once Edward Taylor attempted to use it in his daily life, he could then feel his delight in the obstinate truths about his hard earthly lot and his risky otherworldly possibilities. Hence, the pastor and poet made game of it consistently, as he did in his *Preparatory Meditations*, which allows him to dive imaginatively into divine bliss, with which his faith raises him out of the confines of the terrestrial world peopled with human creatures. Judging from this historical background, what Edward Taylor's *Preparatory Meditations* is about becomes rather apparent. It reveals the religious fact that "delight is the form that man's salvation takes—and in a language appropriate to that delight" (Keller 178).

Therefore, traditional types for Edward Taylor become also poetic shadows or images of personal spiritual realities and intimate fears, desires, or consecrations. In his poetic meditations he seeks not only assurances of personal sanctification, but he also aims to fulfill a self-imposed covenant responsibility to examine his conscience and to sing God's praises. To the vitality of typology as a theological concept which was centuries old and crucial to New England Puritanism, Edward Taylor thus adds the intensity of personal belief and the dynamism of artistic inspiration in the undertaking of his poetic attempts.

It is this combination of typology as well as the dynamism of artistic inspiration that makes Edward Taylor's language full of explosive ejaculations, hyperbolic dramatizations, verbal puns and extravagant conceits. Taylor's verbal performance thence participates in his holy delight, proceeding quite naturally from it and helping greatly to sustain it throughout the stanzas. To see Taylor's "wilderness baroque" within such an esthetic is to place his wit back into the context of his theology where it belongs. Additionally, to see it as part of his theology is to give it an unusual significance for so quaint and contrived a convention of rhetoric. To be sure, it appears to have cheered him a little in his alienation from the divine, as it did other Puritans. It gave him a way of asserting himself within the rigid system of his poetry and it served to stir his religious affections. But Taylor's practice of wit goes well beyond the other New England poets', as so many features of his poetry do. They provide him with a way of exercising his faith, a way of sustaining his hope, and a way of loving his God. His language of delight ("the enjoying faculty")—however worthless and corny it may often appear to be—gave him, though earthbound, an illusion of oneness with his



God. More than anything else, it turned his *Preparatory Meditations* into the richest form of praise for his God that he could ever conceive.

In the final analysis, Edward Taylor belongs not just among the Samuel Mathers and Thomas Taylors, who explicate and preach the religious types from the *Old Testament*, but also among the poets of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The combination of rationality and heightened affections, so characteristic of Taylor's poetic attempts, brings homiletic doctrine from *Upon the Types of the Old Testament* into his religious mediations. This may have its roots in far deeper schizophrenia in Taylor's own religious heritage, one that does not point toward a psychological dividedness, but rather to a potent integration of two human dimensions. In Taylor, one discovers the ascetic, preacher, and physical man concerned with his outward sinfulness and barrenness in the primitive nature. However, he also appears as the spiritual saint transported into the realms of vision. He is both a rationalist who seeks new understandings and a sensualist who wants to feel his faith through his affections. That is, the pastor and poet would rather sense and know divine grace as the same time by means of his meditative poetic ventures. As such, Taylor views his religion in dichotomous terms, namely as a framework that disciplines the unruly and corrupt impulses of mankind and as a source of inspiration that promises mankind ineffable joys. In consequence, his Puritanism embodies both suffering and salvation, which excruciates, so to speak, self-degradations and grace-inspired ecstasies. Every man in some sense reflects Jesus Christ as the suffering martyr and as the resurrected Son. In a very similar timbre, Edward Taylor feels God's divine wrath and his forgiving love. As a public preacher and private petitioner, Taylor reconciles the outer and inner beings into one prototypal Puritan, one who hopes to take his place in Heaven, not among eminent theologians or typologists but among the poets, where he will "sing / New Psalms on Davids Harpe" (Taylor 1960, 2.2). Accordingly, his gift for lyric meditation makes Edward Taylor "both saint and singer" (Rowe 276) in the long run of a distinctive poetics of Puritanism that the pastor-poet took a lifetime to forge and form.

In a nutshell, conventional language is to Edward Taylor obviously a human, therefore fallen, contrivance of expression. He complains about such a fact throughout his *Meditations*. Only in leaps of logic and leaps of metaphor—to human senses, of course, absurd and silly—could truth appear to be revealed. God's sense is nonsense to man and in nonsense God's truth makes its revealing appearance. Language is earthbound, inexpressive, dead, but the articulate fool-in-Christ, namely the poet and the conceitist, has greater opportunity to make that connection with the divine, which in the long run results in spiritual delight for the craftsman of words. Hence, as Hephaestus forges a brave shield for Achilles under the supplication of Thetis, so does Edward Taylor as a pastor and poet forge a new poetics of Puritanism out of the calling of Zion. In *Preparatory Meditations*, the pastor and poet manipulates traditional typological language with a variety of literary devices, which include the maneuvering of questioning, oxymoron, colloquy, inversion, strenuous metaphor, excessive repetition, truncated syntax, catalogue of diseases, and so forth. The intentional manipulation is meant by Edward Taylor to upgrade the fallen, corrupted human language to the bar of that of God and thus create a sort of Zion language in the mundane world of human creatures. Nevertheless, as a logician and pious suppliant at the same time, Taylor sometimes suffers from schizophrenia and moral masochism, which for Freud might happen when the subject, as a result of an unconscious sense of guilt, seeks out the position of victim without any pleasure being directly involved (Laplanche 244). Obviously, the "unconscious sense of guilt" for Taylor, a Puritan pastor, is the inescapable Original Sin. The "predestined" (Miller 17) guilt makes Taylor a born patient who is undergoing the process of so-called talking cure in the light of psychoanalysis, while writing his *Preparatory Meditations* in private as a means of seeking both spiritual relief and pleasure brought about by the verbal liberty of metaphysical wit. On the other hand, the meditations not only embody Taylor's verbal piety, but they contribute to maintaining the Tayloristic unity of matter and spirit. For Edward Taylor, illness is spiritual in origin, and a true

cure resides in a purging or clearing of the channels of divine grace between God and nature. It is through Jesus Christ that grace flows, for He is the ultimate Physician to the human patients (Rainwater 27). Eventually, the more verbally repetitive Taylor is, the more psychologically healthy he will be in his world of poesy.

In conclusion, Edward Taylor's new poetics of Puritanism fuses both Biblical typology and lyrical poetry. It transforms hermeneutic into aesthetic in a way that suggests marked continuities with Transcendentalism. Drawing upon this new poetics of Puritanism, the pastor-poet is not a religious ascetic any more but he becomes a spiritual singer. He not only pursues religious sainthood, but he also buries himself in being a secular as well as personal lyricist. Despite that Taylor's monotonous theme of religion and salvation tends to render his *Preparatory Meditations* into a rigid formulation of religious thought, the free association and lingual freedom embodied in his poetic undertaking, however, celebrates a highly intimate and personalized relation to God the Almighty. To some literary critics, this personalized poetics of Edward Taylor's, albeit Puritan in nature, bears on some sort of lyricism, foreshadows the eventful and eventual emergence of Emersonian individualism as well as later American democracy together with its accompanying capitalism.<sup>4</sup>

*National Chengchi University, Taipei, Taiwan*

### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Taylor did not want his poetry to be published, not even after his death. This is not only because the imagery would have struck his sober New England contemporaries as dangerously sensual and thus popish, or because Taylor's own ideas were similar to the liberal Cambridge Platonism of which the New Englanders were so suspicious. For Ursula Brumm, it seems to be mainly "because his poetry ultimately led him to a sort of allegorical interpretation of the Scriptures, which Puritanism rejected as Catholic and medieval" (Brumm 1970, 57).
- <sup>2</sup> It is important to understand that Puritans seldom used the word *heart* to denote something physical or "visible." It might be defined variously as either the conscious soul or the unconscious will. To understand this, one needs to be aware of the fact that "the question of free will was a *question of freedom* but not of will, as it might be in more recent times" (Johnson 18, emphases mine).
- <sup>3</sup> At the level of concrete psychopathology, Repetition Compulsion (the compulsion to repeat) is an ungovernable process originating in the unconscious. As a result of its action, the subject deliberately places himself in distressing situations, thereby repeating an old experience, but he does not recall this prototype; on the contrary, he has the strong impression that the situation is fully determined by the circumstances of the moment (Laplanche 78).
- <sup>4</sup> For further and detailed discussions on Puritanism's influences upon Transcendentalism, individualism, capitalism, and American democracy, see Bercovitch 6; Keller 1972, 175, 183; Johnson 4–5; Beard 2; Russell 123.

### Works Cited

- Baym, Nina *et al.* *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*. 3rd ed. vol. 1. New York: Norton, 1989. Print.
- Beard, Charles A. "On Puritans." *Puritanism in Early America: Edited with an Introduction by George M. Waller*. Ed. by George M. Waller. Boston: Heath, 1950. 1–4. Print.
- Bensick, Carol M. "Preaching to the Choir: Some Achievements and Shortcomings of Taylor's *God's Determinations*." *Early American Literature* 28. 2 (1993): 133–47. Print.

- Bercovitch, Sacvan. "Introduction." *Typology and Early American Literature*. Ed. Sacvan Bercovitch. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1972. 1-8. Print.
- Bradstreet, Anne. *The Works of Anne Bradstreet in Prose and Verse*. Ed. John Harvard Ellis. 1867. London, 1650. Rpt. New York: Peter Smith, 1937.
- Brumm, Ursula. *American Thought and Religious Typology*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1970. Print.
- . "Edward Taylor and the Poetic Use of Religious Imagery." *Typology and Early American Literature*. Ed. Sacvan Bercovitch. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1972. 191-208. Print.
- Foerster, Norman. *Image of America: Our Literature from Puritanism to the Space Age*. Taipei: Bookman, 1985. Print.
- Johnson, Ellwood. *The Pursuit of Power: Studies in the Vocabulary of Puritanism*. New York: Peter Lang, 1995. Print.
- Hammond, Jeffrey A. "Reading Taylor Exegetically: The *Preparatory Meditations* and the Commentary Tradition." *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 24. 4 (1982): 347-71. Print.
- Huang, Chung-Ying. "On the Art of Edward Taylor's Religious Poetry." *Journal of Beijing Union University: Humanities and Social Sciences*. Vol. 11, No. 3, 2013 pp. 30-36. Print.
- Keller, Karl. *The Example of Edward Taylor*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1975. Print.
- . "'The World Slickt Up in Types': Edward Taylor as a Version of Emerson." *Typology and Early American Literature*. Ed. Sacvan Bercovitch. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1972. 175-190. Print.
- Laplanche J. and J. B. Pontalis. *The Language of Psycho-analysis*. Trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith. New York: Norton, 1973. Print.
- Martz, Louis L. *The Poetry of Meditation: A Study of English Religious Literature of the Seventeenth Century*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962. Print.
- Miller, Perry. "The Puritan Way of Life." *Puritanism in Early America*. Ed. George M. Waller. Lexington: D. C. Heath and Company, 1950. 4-22. Print.
- Munk, Linda. "Edward Taylor: Typology and Puritanism." *History of European Ideas* 17. 1 (1993): 85-93. Print.
- Rainwater, Catherine. "'This Brazen Serpent Is a Doctors Shop': Edward Taylor's Medical Vision." *American Literature and Science*. Ed. Robert J. Scholnick. Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1992. 18-38. Print.
- Reiter, Robert E. "Poetry and Doctrine in Edward Taylor's *Preparatory Meditations* Series II, 1-30." *Typology and Early American Literature*. Ed. Sacvan Bercovitch. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1972. 163-174. Print.
- Rowe, Karen E. *Saint and Singer: Edward Taylor's Typology and the Poetics of Meditation*. London: Cambridge University Press, 1986. Print.
- Russell, Bertrand. *Sceptical Essays*. London: Unwin Brothers, 1952. Print.
- Scheick William J. *The Will and the Word*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1974. Print.
- Taylor, Edward. *Poems of Edward Taylor*. Ed. Donald E. Stanford. Connecticut: New Haven, 1960. Print.
- . *Upon the Type of the Old Testament*. Ed. Charles W. Mignon. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990. Print.
- Waller, George M. ed. *Puritanism in Early America: Edited with an Introduction by George M. Waller*. Boston: Heath, 1950. Print.